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B. L. FARJEON



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IN A SILVER SEA.

BY

B. L. FARJEON,

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NUGGET," "CHRISTMAS ANGEL," "GRIF," ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

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CONTENTS.

CHAPTER I.

	PAGE
HAROLD SEES FACES IN THE SMOKE OF HIS CIGAR	1

CHAPTER II.

A WOMAN'S VOICE BRINGS TO HAROLD A DREAM OF THE PAST	21
---	----

CHAPTER III.

RANF'S NEW HOME	41
---------------------------	----

CHAPTER IV.

RANF APPEARS BEFORE HIS JUDGES	67
--	----

CHAPTER V.

THE ACQUITTAL	89
-------------------------	----

CHAPTER VI.

THE OLD WOUND REOPENED	112
----------------------------------	-----

CHAPTER VII.

	PAGE
HAROLD DEMANDS AN EXPLANATION OF MAU- VAIN	153

CHAPTER VIII.

THE LOVERS	176
----------------------	-----

CHAPTER IX.

HAROLD FINDS HIMSELF AN OUTCAST ON THE SILVER ISLE	182
---	-----

CHAPTER X.

MARGARET RECEIVES THE RECORD OF HAROLD'S GUILT	196
---	-----

CHAPTER XI.

HAROLD AND MAUVAIN VISIT THE HUNCH- BACK	209
---	-----

CHAPTER XII.

THE CHALLENGE	228
-------------------------	-----

CHAPTER XIII.

THE DUEL ON THE MOUNT	235
---------------------------------	-----

IN A SILVER SEA.

CHAPTER I.

HAROLD SEES FACES IN THE SMOKE OF HIS
CIGAR.

“YOUR pardon, gentlemen.”

It was the captain of the vessel who broke in upon their conversation.

“What have you to say, captain?”

“I await your orders; I can get safe anchorage here. Is our voyage at an end?”

“For the present. Yonder lies the Silver Isle—a fair land.”

“It seems so; but I have seen as fair, at a distance, that turned out foul upon a nearer acquaintance.”

“This will not. Let go your anchor; to-morrow morning I shall want a boat to convey one of my servants ashore with a

letter to the islanders. There is nothing to fear from them; the people are not cannibals."

"Maybe not; but you tell me they have no king."

"The greater fortune," said Harold, "for the king they have not. Having no king, they cannot hunt one to death."

"Our king lives, and is safe."

"In banishment," said Mauvain, gloomily, "as we are. Better to have died, sword in hand. Captain, it is likely you will have to put up with us a day or two longer."

"The later we part company, the better I shall be pleased."

Mauvain, with a nod, dismissed the captain, and turned to Harold.

"I am at a loss what to say to the islanders, and to whom to address my missive."

"The letter you gave me on my visit to the isle was addressed to one Sebastian. A stately man, whose white hair flowed over his shoulders. By this time, doubtless,

gathered to his forefathers. I can suggest a younger man."

"Name him."

"Ranf the hunchback."

Mauvain frowned. "There lies an obstacle."

Harold laughed blithely. "My very thought, Mauvain. If my memory does not deceive me, you begged the islanders to accept the hunchback as a trust in kindly remembrance of yourself. Doubtless they appreciated your generosity in having sent them such a Caliban."

"And something worse," said Mauvain, "added to his hunchship."

"There could be nothing worse in human form."

"There is no saying. He had a daughter, remember, of whom you gave me a frightful description, and to whom I gave the name of Evangeline. The islanders may not have forgiven me for the malicious trick. If the girl has fulfilled the promise of her youth, we may find not only a Caliban, but a younger Sycorax on the Silver Isle. Would you

believe, Harold, that Ranf once told me a woman loved him? It is inconceivable, and yet I must do the hunchback the justice to say that I believe him not to be guilty of falsehood. You are silent, Harold. Are you thinking of the hunchback's daughter, and dreading her spells? For by this time, if she live (it may mercifully have happened that they are both removed from mortal spheres) she is a mistress of all that is foul in nature. I can see her already, with bent back, searching the woods for poisonous herbs for purposes of witchcraft. The account you gave me of your voyage hither in such company is very vivid in my mind: all his hideousness reproduced in her, a very monkey in mischief, body as twisted, hair unkempt, limbs crooked—"

"Hold!" cried Harold. "Be a little merciful. There are fair sins as ill-begotten."

"Make me," continued Mauvain, appearing to take pleasure in the subject, "a group in stone of this interesting couple. Do you remember my suggesting it to

you? And look forward with a prophet's eye, I said, and cut the figures as they will be in twenty years. You performed the task well; you have the soul of an artist, Harold, and when you are interested in a work, excellence is the result. You modelled Ranf to the life, an old man whose likeness lives only in the being we know, and projecting your mind into the future, you created in stone the figure of a woman so startling in its weird ugliness that it would have made the fortune of a sculptor had the critics dealt with it. Ranf and this hideous Evangeline side by side, stooping over a pool of water. There is no mistaking that the repulsive pair are father and daughter. It was a trick, Harold, but most truly original, that you should have hewn out of the marble over which these creatures are bending, a great hollow, with a floor of glass, so that, being filled with clear water, the reflection of the two faces is plainly seen. This marvellously original Evangeline shall be set up in the grounds of my house on the Silver Isle—"

“Impossible!” interrupted Harold. “The iconoclasts of our unhappy country have by this time criticized it with their hammers.”

“It happens otherwise, fortunately. Foreseeing what was coming, and thinking it not unlikely that we should have to fly the country, I had certain household treasures packed up and conveyed to the seaside. They are in the hold of this vessel at the present moment, and your Ranf and Evangeline among them. I shall have an opportunity, if the interesting couple are alive, of comparing living flesh with dumb stone, and of proving what kind of a prophet you were when you designed the group.”

“It is scarcely worth while,” said Harold, with a slight tremor in his voice, “to inflict humiliation upon me.”

“Humiliation, Harold! Explain.”

“It is not pleasant to look, in our ripe age, upon the mistakes of our earlier years. My life—in other respects, as well as in that of an artist—has been a failure. I am painfully conscious of this lamentable con-

clusion. The group you speak of may be classed among youth's extravagances, which serve their purpose for the time (not in the healthiest way), and then are best forgotten."

"You underrate yourself, Harold. Had you possessed industry and application—"

"Two words, Mauvain, not to be found in my vocabulary."

"Nor in mine; but I did not need them. Had you possessed these qualities, you would have shone in the world with even a brighter light than you have shone in private circles. For it has been said of you frequently that you are an artist of a divine mould, and that you belong, of your own force and power, to the race of those who have made art a religion. You have in you the true fire, and the world would have hailed you as a prophet inspired. Your indolence stopped the way of your advancement. The world has lost a leader; your friends have been the gainers."

"You are generous in your praise;

give me a further exhibition of your generosity."

"I can deny you nothing, Harold."

"I thank you. You will, then, present me with the group of Ranf and Evangeline, which, indeed and in truth, is a reproach to the art I worship. Let me be judged by what I believe is worthy of me, not by what I know will tend to lower me."

"If art workers were their own critics, they would condemn their most perfect productions. You would destroy your child."

"It is a crime, of which I do not care to be perpetually reminded."

"Pardon the seeming indelicacy of the remark; I paid you for the group, Harold."

The sculptor winced, as though a lash had been laid across his shoulders. "You paid me liberally, Mauvain."

"It is mine, therefore, and I am its owner, judge, and critic. You have a perverse sensitiveness. You have done nothing so fine as this. No, Harold, I cannot give it you."

“Sell it to me, then,” said Harold, with earnestness.

“I am not,” said Mauvain, somewhat haughtily, and yet with a touch of amusement in his tone, “a dealer in curiosities. I cannot sell the group. Dismiss the subject. Come with me to the saloon, and assist me in my letter to the islanders.”

The ship lay at anchor that night. The sailors sang their sea-songs, the rough melodies of which became softened as they floated over the waters. With the moonlight on it, the isle looked like a fairy isle; the soft waves lapped the shore, along which sauntered here and there a couple in their springtime. The future was theirs, and their hearts were light; no shadows rested on their lives. Harold remained upon the deck, gazing on the isle, and thinking of the past. His thoughts travelled in these grooves :

“Could we but tear some leaves out of the book! Or, better still, could we destroy the book itself! Turn over the pages, Harold. What do you see?

“Wasted days and nights; mis-spent

endeavour; masses of violent colour; harmony robbed of sweetness; beauty out of proportion, such as weak-brained æsthetics love to draw; tangles of artificial flowers; painted women; men with the souls of waiters; false protestations.

“What a jumble of discordances! Struggling one with another, not for the purpose of arriving at some sort of order and decency, but for the purpose of asserting an enjoyment of the hours which becomes pain when the touchstone of true manliness is applied to it. Even at the time its worst pages were written, a glimmering of this entered my mind.

“A witch’s revel. The beauties of nature distorted and insulted, and mud flung upon purity. Miracles on every side. Spring’s tenderness; summer’s perfectness; autumn’s peacefulness; winter’s white loveliness;—all mocked, derided, belittled (if Nature can be) by false refinement or coarse indulgence.

“A creditable production, such a book, for a mortal endowed with reason, imagination, and an indolent affectation of ideality.

If this life were all, it would but be adding wasted time to wasted time to occupy the moments in regret and self-reproach. In such a belief, every hour should be made to yield its measure of enjoyment; it would be an intellectual exercise of opportunity to exact this tribute from time which flies or lags according to our humour. But it is not all; we are something higher than beasts of the field.

“Herein lies the appalling shadow. The phantom of your higher self rises before you, and with sad eyes demands an account.

“I render it. Not mine, all the fault. My boat has drifted on, and I have not striven to direct its course. I am wrong; there was a time when a spirit on the shore seemed to say, ‘There is in life an earnest, lovely field before you; there is in life a sweeter hope, in whose light your higher aspirations shall be realized; love shall give you earnestness and courage.’ But the voice I seemed to hear was of my own creation. The spirit stood before me, but its tongue was mute; its heart never responded to mine.

“So much for the past. Let it go. Retain only what is pure and sweet. The future still is yours.

“How many years ago is it since I visited this fairy isle? The memory of the few hours I spent upon its shores lingers with me like a pleasant dream. The child I brought hither, in strange uncongenial society, is a woman now, fair and beautiful. There is no doubt of it. ‘Princess of the Silver Isle, I kiss your fairy fingers.’ My very words come back to me. She gave me her hand, with nature’s true grace, and so I left her.

“Were I a painter, I would draw the picture. The child, the hunchback, and I. The islanders standing a little apart, the reapers looking on. All the accessories perfect. But without being a painter, I can draw Evangeline’s likeness: No Sycorax, Mauvain. The loveliest Miranda. If I had such a spirit-slave as Ariel to show me this Miranda in her living form!

“Dreams, Harold! will you never be practical? I answer myself. I think—never.”

As Harold gazed and mused, the night deepened, and the lovers left the sea-shore for the inland.

At midnight Mauvain came on deck, smoking a cigar, and walked to where Harold was lying on his side with the moonlight streaming on him.

“Asleep, Harold?”

The sculptor did not reply; he had fallen asleep, with tender fancies in his mind. His position was a dangerous one; his form swayed to and fro with the rocking of the ship in the swell of the waves, and a sudden lurch would have sent him into the sea. Mauvain stooped over him and awoke him. Harold opened his eyes languidly.

“Cruel to wake me,” he murmured. “I was dreaming of another world.”

“You might have been in it,” said Mauvain, “but for me. A deeper swelling of a chance wave, and you would have glided into the sea.”

“And so through water to another state of being. An easy mode of transition, which one would choose if one had the

power ; but there consciousness sets in. It is dangerous, too, they say, to sleep with the moonlight on your face ; and I have been doing so. Madness might visit the sleeper, a different kind of madness from that which we endeavour to hide from the knowledge of the world. Give me a cigar, Mauvain. So, you did not wish to lose me."

"Life on the isle," replied Mauvain, imitating unconsciously the indolent tone of his friend, "would be intolerable without a kindred soul such as yours to sympathize with."

"Or play upon. Eh, Mauvain ? Confess. You have used men."

"Having the right."

"Undoubtedly. Who has ever disputed it ? You should have been a king, and your right would have been divine. Notice how still the air is. It scarcely disturbs the smoke from our cigars, which of its own volition ascends and spreads until it is merged into invisible ether. It is pretty while it lasts, and gives ample time for fancy in the way of faces. Here is a face ; Ranf's. It is impossible for you to see it ;

raise one for yourself. My Ranf twists and curls and grins with impish malice. Ranf was a strong man—strong in character, I mean. Between you and him some passages have taken place. He saved your life, I believe?”

“He rendered me service at a critical time. I paid him for it.”

“As you always do. You pay, and there’s an end. Blood, brain, heart, are so bought and fairly paid for—even the soul may be included, for it is customary to pay for prayer. What can have induced a being like Ranf to jeopardize his life for you? He is not too fond of his betters.’

“You forget, he was my servant.”

“He is free now. All men are equals on the Silver Isle. A state of things we have flown from; I never thought of that. So! Ranf’s face has curled itself away—not the thinnest line remains. And here comes a perfect cluster of faces, women’s faces, all lovely. A vision of the women of the isle, enchanting in the prospect it holds out. To think that smoke-colour should be capable of such variety

and vividness ! I am becoming resigned to the loss of a worn-out world. There was nothing new in it, Mauvain ; day after day, week after week, the same. Here we have the chance of something novel in sensation."

"What you sigh for," said Mauvain, in a tone of quiet contempt, "may happen, and then you will taste a joy it is impossible I can ever have enjoyed."

"You have a faithful memory. The jangle of faces has disappeared, and in the curling wreaths I see one, the fairest and most beautiful of all. What name to attach to it?—there have been so many ! What name ? What name ? Am I grown suddenly old that I cannot recall the name of one so exquisitely fair ?"

"As you say, Harold, there are so many."

"But this one, of all others. Simple, childlike, with no knowledge of the world, friendless and alone, innocent, helpless as a flower. Tut ! tut ! I have it on my tongue, and it will not come."

"Why trouble yourself about her ? She

has forgotten you, as you have forgotten her."

"I have never forgotten her; but age plays tricks. Do you not find it so? You are older than I, and therefore a better judge. Ah! I have it. Clarice!"

Mauvain flicked the ash off his cigar. "Clarice. Yes, she was fair, and may have deserved all your encomiums."

"She did, as you know."

"You are dictatorial. Despite all your denials you have faith in woman. I never had."

"I am in a strange mood, Mauvain. Clarice was all I have described."

"To please you, granted. What then?"

"Merely that the age of chivalry never existed, for the reason that men are men."

"And women, women. You have finished your rhapsody, I presume."

"I extinguish it with this cigar." He threw his lighted cigar into the sea. The light flickered for a moment, and then was extinguished. "And so, its brief joy slain, it drifts as I and others have drifted, into the unknown. Good-night, Mauvain."

“ Good-night, mad-brain.”

The next morning a boat was rowed to shore, and a messenger landed, bearing a letter, which he was instructed to deliver to some person in authority. It ran as follows :

“ DEAR FRIENDS OF THE SILVER ISLE.”
—A cruel destiny compels me once more to seek shelter among you. My country is in the hands of a lawless rabble, who have torn down the sacred symbols of authority. Had opportunity offered, I would have chosen to die by the side of my king, but I was debarred that happiness. Compelled to fly—the choice of an honourable death not being mine—my thoughts travelled to the peaceful land in which I passed some happy years. I feel that I shall be welcome. The house I built upon your isle will shelter me ; I desire to retire to it, for rest and seclusion ; and when my mind, disturbed by recent events, has recovered its balance, I shall mix among you as of old, and take my share in the duties of citizenship. I have with me a few relics which I saved from fortune’s

wreck, and these I shall convey to my house when it is ready to receive me.—In all good will, dear friends,

“MAUVAIN.”

The letter was read and commented upon, and the messenger was questioned.

“Is Mauvain alone?”

“No; he has friends and servants with him.”

“Then it is for others, as well as for himself, he desires a welcome?”

To this the messenger made no reply.

“Mauvain speaks of relics he has brought with him. Of what do they consist?”

“Furniture, family memorials, and such-like.”

“Acquaint us with your full instructions.”

“Simply to receive your reply, and convey it to Mauvain.”

“Does he know that his house is occupied?”

“I cannot say.”

After a long deliberation, at which the messenger was not allowed to be present,

the following letter was sent by his hands to Mauvain.

“From the inhabitants of the Silver Isle to Mauvain :

“We recognize the claim you have upon us. You own a house and land in our isle, and we have also treasure of yours, which we are ready to pay over to you. Your house has been in the occupation of a family named Sylvester ; it is in their occupation now. A few days must necessarily elapse before they can shift their home ; in the interval we offer you the best accommodation at our disposal. Let us know your pleasure.”

When this letter was read upon ship-board, Harold made a wry face.

“It smacks of constraint,” he said ; “there is a flavour of vinegar about it.”

But Mauvain professed to be satisfied with its tone, saying it was sufficient for him that his rights were recognized ; and he informed the islanders, through his messenger, that his pleasure was to remain on board ship until his house was empty, and ready to receive him.

CHAPTER II.

A WOMAN'S VOICE BRINGS TO HAROLD A DREAM
OF THE PAST.

THE news of Mauvain's return spread far and wide over the Silver Isle, and was not hailed with satisfaction. The prevailing thought with regard to him was, "We have had enough of strangers." This expression of feeling concerned neither Evangeline nor Margaret Sylvester, two of the three strangers living on the isle. It touched only Ranf the hunchback.

A week after the exchange of the letters between Mauvain and the islanders, Harold—he and Mauvain being still on board ship—said to Mauvain,—

"I sigh for mother earth; this monotony of rest, this eternal rocking to and fro, is sapping the very foundations of my being."

“I, too, am weary of it,” said Mauvain.

“Let us impart variety into the hours ; we will go ashore.”

“I do not stir from the ship until my house is ready to receive me.”

“Which according to reckoning—I am becoming quite nautical in my expressions—will not be for many days yet. I cannot endure this uneventful routine any longer ; I shall pay my respects to the soil. Accompany me in disguise, and we will seek adventure. No ? Well, I must go alone. You will see me again in the evening. Entrust me with a commission.”

“Ascertain for me, if you can, the exact day upon which this family of the Sylvesters will oblige me by quitting my house, and if in a gentle way you can intimate to them that they are lagging somewhat and are thereby entailing discomfort upon me, I shall not object. You may say to them, if you please, in the event of their showing a disposition to condemn me to these planks for a longer time than is absolutely necessary, that I should regret to be compelled to enforce my rights.”

“ By force, Mauvain ? ”

“ If necessary.”

“ It might not be prudent to adopt such a course.”

“ I am accustomed to shape my own course, Harold.”

“ Forgive me for supposing it possible you could be in error. Adieu till evening.”

It was noon when he left the ship, and night before he returned.

Mauvain, waiting on deck for his friend, greeted him immediately with the question :

“ How were you received ? ”

“ A moment, Mauvain. I am really, in my idle way, full of news, but it must filtrate slowly, my mind being dilatory. You have wine there.” Harold filled a large glass, and emptied it at a draught. “ Nectar. Life is worth having.”

“ Have you not eaten since you left the ship ? ”

“ A little. I asked for fruit, and they gave it to me ; but they did not give it without the asking ; and only one man invited me to his house. This cigar, Mauvain, has a delicious flavour. Life is a

precious gift. I foresee more unlikely things than that I should become the grossest of materialists. How was I received? Variously. By some who did not know me I was looked upon, I think, as a curiosity. Our friends yonder are not accustomed to fine gentlemen."

"I am beginning to alter my opinion of them. It may be nearer the mark to say that they are not accustomed to gentlemen. A distinction with a difference."

"Decidedly; but I prefer my own words in this instance, for I am not at all certain that the Silver Isle is without specimens of the gentleman, pure and simple—as in sober truth he ought to be. I have seen to-day men whose manners would not disgrace a court, men whose stateliness was natural. Their dignity becomes them the better because, in my inexperienced eyes, it lacks artificiality."

"Ah, I have sometimes thought that you were better fitted for the grove than the court."

"If that be so, I shall be here in my element. To nearly every person I met on

the isle I was a stranger, and as I have said, I was regarded as a curiosity. It might pay us, Mauvain, to exhibit ourselves in cages."

"Is it possible, Harold, for you to speak seriously for three consecutive minutes?"

"I do not know; I have never tried. Anything in the shape of effort is eminently distasteful to me. When I have a thing to tell, I must tell it in my own way. Among the strangers on the isle there were, perhaps, a dozen men and women who had a remembrance of me. One or two of these, recognizing me, smiled, and then checked their smiles; the others, recognizing me, frowned, and did not check their frowns. It set me thinking a little. I asked for Father Sebastian; he is dead. So, there I found myself a stranger, in a land of strangers, and impressed with the distressing conviction that with the men and women of the isle I was a failure. But happily for me there are children in the world. Mauvain, I have always been successful with children,

and those I met on the Silver Isle won my heart, as I may say without vanity I won theirs."

"It is not difficult to believe, Harold. You have a sunny manner, which frequently compels men to overlook your faults. I myself, having in your absence been angry with you, have forgotten my anger when you have appeared. You possess a charming magnetism, Harold."

"You are graciousness itself. But I am afraid that I am not magnetic to the serious-minded; when they and I come into contact, it is I who am magnetized. There is a certain attractiveness in our conversations, Mauvain, upon which I have occasionally pondered. They resemble the flight of a swallow. We never seem able to come straight to the point. We are full of interludes—"

"Of your creation, Harold; I am the audience, you the actor."

"Is it so? I hope I play my part well. The present conversation is a case in point. Here am I speaking to you upon a serious subject—"

“ A serious subject ! ” exclaimed Mauvain, laughing.

“ Yes. Have I not approached it ? It shows the trivial nature of my mind. I will come to it very soon. I was speaking of the reception I met with on the isle. In brief, some looked upon me as a curiosity, some smiled upon me, and then frowned ; some frowned upon me, and then did not smile ; which was a pity, as it disturbed the balance. Children spring into my arms at my invitation, and allowed me to fondle them ; but strangely enough their parents took them from me, without ‘ with your leave ’ or ‘ by your leave. ’ Even two or three maidens, who seemed inclined to receive me agreeably, were drawn out of the reach of my fascinations. I deplored this deeply, for they were very fair. Upon the whole, therefore, I am inclined to the belief that I was right when I told you that the letter the islanders sent in reply to yours had a flavour of vinegar about it. They will not erect triumphal arches when you land.”

“ It matters not ; I shall be able to win them over.”

“I executed your commission. The Sylvesters are building a house into which they will remove as soon as it is completed. This will occupy them another week. The house is of wood, and only one storey, covering a large space of ground. Those are the most sensible tenements; it is as Nature intended us to live. The Sylvesters are respected on the isle. The silver-mine you discovered, and made yours by purchase of the land, has been occasionally worked—but not during the last few years—and the islanders have kept faithful account of the royalty due to you. I was requested to hand this paper to you. It is a statement of dates and weight of silver produced, which no doubt you will find correct.”

“You are forgetting the serious subject, Harold.”

“I am not likely to, Mauvain; it will unfold itself presently. It was not my good fortune until the evening to meet with the Sylvesters who have done you the honour to occupy your house in your absence. They are under an obligation

to you; but it seems they have squared accounts by rendering you an obligation."

"In what way?"

"By taking charge of Evangeline; she has lived with them as their child."

"Was not her father a sufficient guardian?"

"Her father?"

"Ranf."

"Pardon me; I forgot. Upon that point I am not informed."

"I must be dull-witted, Harold, for I cannot see how these Sylvesters have laid me under an obligation by adopting even so ill-favoured a being as Evangeline as their child. It was a matter which concerned only themselves and the hunchback."

"You forget the nature of the letter you wrote to the islanders when you sent Ranf and Evangeline in my charge to the Silver Isle. In the house of a magistrate, the only house of which the doors were open to me, is a box, inscribed with your name. This box contains a record of all transac-

tions and doings in which you bear a part ; the letter I delivered to Father Sebastian is there, and I asked to see it. In it you say : ‘ I send you a trust which I ask you to accept in kindly remembrance of one who owes you already a debt of gratitude he can never repay ; by doing so you will confer upon me an inestimable obligation.’ Evangeline, being then a child, it was naturally supposed that your wishes would be better carried out if she were adopted by a family who had children of their own with whom Evangeline could associate.”

“ Let me think a moment, Harold. Ranf appeared to be devoted to his child. His consent to the separation had to be obtained.”

“ He gave it freely.”

“ It is incomprehensible.”

“ You would not undertake to judge the actions of such a creature as Ranf by an ordinary standard. He may have wished to show he was capable of self-sacrifice. Be that as it may, Evangeline has lived with the Sylvesters, apart from Ranf, and thus you are in some sense under an obligation

to them. I was curious about these Sylvesters, on Evangeline's account more than on their own—— I see a look of inquiry in your eyes."

"I am endeavouring to discover why you take so singular an interest in this Evangeline."

"Was I not her sponsor on the isle?"

"And have you not fashioned her in stone? Has the hideous a fascination for you as well as the beautiful? By the way, she lives?"

"So I am informed."

"You did not see her, then?"

"No."

"And Ranf? Does he still favour the earth with his presence?"

"Yes. Him I shall see to-morrow."

"Continue. I interrupted you at the words, 'you were curious about these Sylvesters.'"

"I asked where they were to be found, and was told they were absent. In the evening, as I was making my way to the boat which was waiting for me, I heard the voice of a woman, singing. The voice was

soft and tender, and very sweet. Only once before in my life have I heard such singing, and then, Mauvain, you were in my company. The woman who was singing was walking towards me, but owing to a curve in the path—a narrow path, between hedges—she was not yet in sight. Mauvain, I cannot describe to you the impression this strangely sweet voice had upon me. It recalled a scene in the past which has lived in my memory, but has never been so boldly reproduced. Why, Mauvain, if you will believe me, the narrow lane through which I was walking vanished from my sight, and with it the sunset which glorified the heavens. For a moment the present was suspended, and I saw a room in which three men were sitting, you, I, and another. I was idle; you and the third were playing for high stakes. The room was only partially lighted up; the distant part of it was in shadow. Moving in the shadow was a girl, almost a child, exquisite as a fairy dream; and standing near her, motionless, was another, older than the dancer, singing

softly in a voice as sweet as that which now I heard. The vision lasted but for a moment, and I was again standing between the fragrant hedgerows in the narrow lane. The woman approached me, and I stood aside to allow her to pass. Our eyes met. Mauvain, you spoke just now of magnetism. Some magnetism was at work at the moment of our meeting; it flashed from her eyes into mine, from my eyes into hers. and it held us spell-bound, as in a magic chain."

"A young woman, and alone," said Mauvain, lighting another cigar, and handing his case to Harold. "I always take an interest in these adventures. You were fortunate that there were no churls near to object to your paying this pretty creature the attentions of a gentleman."

"She was at least forty years of age, and she spoke no word to me, and I no word to her. The spell broken, she passed away in silence. At a distance I followed her until I met a person, of whom I asked the woman's name. It was Margaret."

"Not Margaret only. Your cigar is

out, Harold. Light a fresh one, from mine. What other name does this woman bear?"

"Sylvester. Now let me tell you what I learnt of the history of this woman."

"With pleasure. You have been industrious, Harold."

"She is not a native of the Silver Isle. Her husband and her husband's father, both of whom were born here, had many years ago a vagrant fit which nothing could cure but a spell of adventure in the old world. They left the Silver Isle, not knowing whether they should ever return to it. At that time Margaret's husband was a boy, and he and his father in the old world led a wandering life as travelling actors—you are becoming interested, I see. When the boy had grown to manhood he and Margaret met, and from that time were never separated. The usual story, Mauvain—they loved."

"You are a polished story-teller, Harold; you invest the commonest incidents with a certain interest. Margaret was alone when they met."

“So far alone that she had no relatives ; she was an orphan. The odd part of the affair is that Margaret, at the time she and the Sylvesters were thrown into each other’s company, was leading the same kind of life as themselves—had, in fact, been brought up to it.”

“There is nothing very odd in it. A simple coincidence, of a kind upon which weak-minded and superstitious people hang absurd and childish theories.”

“That is all you see in it, Mauvain.”

“That is all. What more do you expect me to see ?”

“I cannot say. Mauvain, enlighten me. I have already confessed that I have made a study of you. Is there nothing beneath the surface ?”

“You are going a little too far, Harold.”

“Ah, if I had your temperament ! You are not easily disturbed, Mauvain.”

“Not easily.”

“I envy you. For pure enjoyment of life I know no one whose qualities are superior to yours.”

“Depend upon it, Harold, my philosophy is the best. You have not told me what brought Margaret to the Silver Isle.”

“The Sylvesters were not fortunate in the old world ; and when the son Paul and Margaret were married they adopted the sensible course of returning to the Silver Isle, in which, if ambitious aspirations cannot be realized, peace and plenty can at least be depended on.”

“This, then, is the serious subject you wished to speak of.”

“You mistake, Mauvain,” replied Harold, in a tone of surprise ; “there is nothing serious in what I have told you. A web of odd fragments, strung together in a fanciful way by a man too fond of dreaming. You should understand me better by this time. The serious part of my communication refers to Ranf.”

“Now you really interest me, Harold.”

“You said lately that Ranf once boasted to you that a woman loved him. Love is still the theme, and Ranf the hero. Would you believe there are sinners on the Silver

Isle—fair sinners who love not wisely? And that such a man should inspire the passion! Yet it is gravely averred that between Ranf and some woman on the isle love-passages have taken place. My knowledge of the affair extends thus far. It being known that I was on the isle, a messenger seeks me, and requests me to accompany him to the house of a magistrate before whom and others Ranf is summoned to appear to-morrow. To this magistrate, a greybeard, I accordingly present myself. ‘You are come in good time,’ says the gentleman to me, and forthwith launches into the subject, pledging me beforehand not to make it common talk. Ranf, it appears, has led a lonely life upon the isle, having one whole friend in Evangeline, and some half friends in the members of the Sylvester family. Add to these the woman whom the hunchback has bewitched, and the list of those favourably disposed to him is complete. The magistrate expressed himself to me in these terms: ‘During the years,’ he said, ‘that the hunchback has lived upon

the isle, he has broken no law within our knowledge. He has held aloof from us, but that he was free to do. He has not attended our churches'—(by the way, Mauvain, that is a duty in which we must not fail; the islanders evidently set store upon it, and it will invest us with an air of sanctity)—'He has not attended our churches,' said the magistrate, 'but in that he was also entitled to be free; it is a matter affecting the conscience, and we dictate to no man's. His residence on the isle was not agreeable to us, but we had made him welcome here, and so long as he openly violated no law, and did not brawl or create dissension, the welcome could not be withdrawn. An explanation is now to be demanded of him, and it is but just that you and Mauvain, who are responsible for his presence among us, should attend to hear what charge is to be brought against him.' It was then that it occurred to me to ask whether the letter you gave me for Father Sebastian was in existence; it was produced from the box I told you of inscribed with

your name. I scarcely knew what answer to make to the request for our attendance."

"You did not answer for my movements, Harold."

"No, only for my own. I promised to attend, and said that I would mention the matter to you."

"I shall not trouble myself; an account from your lips of what transpires will be infinitely more diverting. Ranf is an insolent knave, and age cannot have improved him. Is it certain that he will obey the summons?"

"It appears to be doubtful; he has made himself not only disliked, but feared. However, to-morrow will show whether, having come into collision with the islanders, he will risk open warfare with them. I confess to looking forward to the entertainment with pleasurable anticipation; and I am more than curious to see the kind of woman Ranf has managed to beguile. Mauvain, it occurs to me that our residence on the isle is likely to be attended with some excitement and amuse-

ment. Are you going below? I shall remain on deck, and dream of one woman's fair face and another woman's sweet voice. The nightingale's notes are not more melodious."

CHAPTER III.

RANF'S NEW HOME.

THE charge that Ranf was about to be called upon to answer was one of serious import, and colour was given to it by the conduct of the hunchback himself.

Morality with the islanders was a religion, and those who violated its laws could not hope to be forgiven. Being mortal, they were not without sin; but sin was punished without mercy. The uncompromising attitude of the simple people towards those among them who were guilty, harsh and uncharitable as it was in its individual aspect, had often, doubtless, a deterrent effect upon others whose footsteps were straying. In this respect, its application was productive of good; but erring souls were made to suffer most keenly, and led to believe that forgive-

ness was only to be obtained hereafter by a lifetime of expiation. "Forgiveness must come from above," said the islanders; "it is not ours to bestow." Vicarious atonement was unknown; such a doctrine would have been scouted. Each must account for his own. Crime and sin were followed by earthly punishment, which upon the Silver Isle generally assumed the shape of personal avoidance. The guilty one was cut off from companionship, and necessarily from sympathy. Those who from his birth had greeted him with affection now turned their faces from him. The friendly hand was withheld, the loving word was not spoken. If pity was felt, it was not expressed. He was not allowed to starve; he was simply made to feel that he had lost his place among his fellow-men. In such a land as the Silver Isle it was difficult to conceive a punishment more bitter.

It is often thus with the kindest hearts—hearts which throb and quiver at the lightest touch. Faith once broken can never be restored; an injustice inflicts a wound which can never be healed.

Some time after Ranf's discovery of gold in the caves of the Silver Isle a vessel named the *White Dove* anchored in the bay. Its device was a dove lying helpless within the talons of an eagle. The *White Dove* was loaded with ploughs and harrows and agricultural implements of superior make and construction, and when its captain was asked whether he came to trade, his answer was that his business concerned only one man on the Silver Isle—Ranf the deformed. It then transpired that the cargo was consigned to Ranf, between whom and the captain a long private interview took place. A canvas tent was hastily thrown up, and the cargo was landed and stored therein; a written notice affixed outside the tent proved to be an invitation to the islanders to inspect the cargo of the *White Dove*. All the latest improvements in agricultural science were there exemplified, and the islanders immediately recognized their value. "But of what use," they asked each other, "is such a cargo to Ranf? He has only himself to provide for, and he has hitherto shown no

disposition to till the land." They were soon enlightened. Matthew Sylvester being employed as an intermediary, signified to the islanders that Ranf desired to express in a substantial manner his acknowledgment of the kindness of the inhabitants of the isle in permitting him to reside upon their soil and live his life among them unmolested. The cargo had been carefully selected to meet their requirements, and to assist them in their noble pursuit. It was theirs ; Ranf wished them to accept it from him as a free gift.

They wondered at this, bearing in mind the scant good-will that existed between them. "The hunchback owes us nothing," they said, with a twinge of self-reproach, and they hesitated before accepting so valuable a gift. Here and there doubts were raised. The cargo was the most costly that had ever come to the Silver Isle ; how had Ranf become possessed of it ? Matthew Sylvester conveyed to them Ranf's explanation. He had long had at his disposal a store of wealth which had

lain idly by, and he had lately come into possession of further treasure, of which he desired to make judicious use. The islanders suspected nothing ; their wildest imaginings could scarcely have hit upon the truth, and the explanation was received in good faith. So much mystery surrounded Ranf that what would have been regarded in other men as fabulous was in him regarded as credible and commonplace. Still they refused to accept the gift without rendering an equivalent for it. Then said Ranf, through his spokesman,—

“Let it be so ; it shall be a matter of bargain between us. What can they give me in exchange ? ”

He lacked neither food nor cattle. He hit upon the only equivalent he would accept.

“There is a piece of waste land,” he said, still conveying his wishes by proxy, “uncultivated and unbuilt upon, which I would call my own.”

The question was asked of him what he would do with this land.

“Dig a grave on it,” he replied. “But no ; I will do better than that.”

The land he coveted was about twenty acres in extent, beautifully situated on the slope of a hill which dipped into a valley known as the Valley of Lilies. It was to some extent a fair exchange, although the balance of value still lay with the cargo, and the bargain was made, the more readily on the part of the islanders because, after the display of so gracious a spirit by Ranf, they were not unwilling that he should have an opportunity of showing that he was made of better stuff than they had given him credit for. One or two said,—

“The hunchback is weary of the silent warfare that has existed between us. When he first came upon our isle a bad commencement was made. Many sweet nuts have rough shells. We may have been mistaken in Ranf. His nature may have more of good in it than we have been able to discern.”

“Ah,” said Ranf, with a bitter smile, upon hearing, second-hand, the expression of these sentiments, “they have truly been mistaken in me. They did not know I

was one of those men who, being struck on one cheek, meekly hold out the other for a second blow. One would suppose it difficult to discover in this world who are the sinners and who the saints."

Without further parley, however, the transaction was completed. Deeds were drawn up and signed, and the land became Ranf's freehold.

It was not noticed at the time that it included the grave in which Bertha's child was buried.

Then the islanders became curious to learn to what use Ranf intended to turn his land. He did not leave them long in doubt. The *White Dove* took its departure, and after a reasonable interval returned with another cargo, consigned also to Ranf, consisting of the choicest timber for building and decorative purposes. Up to this time Ranf had not been seen in the negotiations respecting the transfer of the freehold. He had been observed at nights walking over his land, examining it and measuring it, and apparently making himself thoroughly

familiar with its formation and peculiarities ; but he came and went in silence. He now made his appearance among the islanders.

Age had not improved him. His hump had grown larger, his body smaller ; his face was more morose, his limbs more disproportioned, his manners more uncouth. A rough shell, indeed, giving no indication of hidden sweetness.

He came to make application for permission to hire a number of men to help him build a house upon his freehold. As this intention appeared to convey a desire for companionship, permission was readily given, and he at once made arrangements with the best workmen on the isle, selecting them with shrewd judgment, and engaging them by written bond for a certain fixed time. He paid them liberally in such articles of ornament and utility as they were anxious to possess. Some bargained for cattle and waggons ; some for tools and implements ; some for skins and silks and seed ; some for books and scientific instruments. Thus Ranf became the

means of introducing into the isle many curious and useful articles of which the islanders had heard but which they had never possessed. The *White Dove* brought all that was desired, and more ; Ranf's orders were given in the most liberal spirit, and payment for labour was made with lavish, almost reckless generosity. In speaking of him afterwards the men who worked for him said they believed their most extravagant demands would have been complied with, so long as they obeyed the orders of their employer ; they might have had tools of gold had they asked for them ; but nevertheless there was scarcely one who did not regret that he had ever entered into service with the hunchback, and with singular unanimity they all declared that they would as soon work for the Evil One as again for such a man. Could they have quitted his service with honour they would have done so without hesitation ; but he held them by bond, and the law was on his side. For this discontent Ranf was responsible. Everything seemed to be so devised as to be-

wilder the men ; they were unceremoniously taken from one piece of work which was growing beneath their hands (for they were faithful workers, and took delight in their work), and put on another ; orders were given and as they were about to be executed were countermanded, out of sheer maliciousness it was contended ; comrades were parted, and kept at a distance from one another ; before a task was finished the men engaged on it were taken away, and others who were ignorant of the first design appointed to finish it ; not only maliciousness, but jealousy, reigned. In all this confusion, in all these eccentricities, the hunchback was the moving spirit ; never for a moment was he still ; “ He has quicksilver, not blood, in his veins,” said the men ; he was restless and irresistible, and seemed to possess the power of being in a dozen places at one time. Occasionally he said, “ Well done ;” but those to whom the praise was addressed did not receive it with pleasure ; “ It will be well done,” said they, “ when our time has expired.” The conformation of the grounds around the

building that was being erected was altered; hillocks were levelled, watercourses formed, a pretty stream was made to meander through the land; they recognized no system in the orders that were given. Here their judgment was at fault, being warped by prejudice, for in the midst of all this apparent bewilderment a fine design was being surely and systematically accomplished, and Ranf's project, well considered and matured, was being carried out exactly and to the minute as he intended. The workmen themselves, when it dawned upon their minds, ascribed it to magic, an idea which the more practical ones laughed at, without being able to account for the results accomplished. Gradually and surely the work progressed until it was in some part completed; and then it was seen that Ranf owned the most perfect and beautiful house in the Silver Isle. Its originality added to its beauty. If it was Ranf's desire to invest it with a mystery which rendered it impossible for any of the workmen to give a faithful description of it, he achieved his wish, for none could correctly

describe its interior. One said it contained so many rooms; another said so many; not two accounts agreed. The grounds around the house were laid out with exquisite taste, and rare shrubs and flowers were imported to beautify them; the marvel was that such a being as Ranf could have conceived and executed a plan so strangely beautiful. From all parts of the isle men, women, and children came to admire, and many lingered in the hope of seeing some of the hidden wonders; but none were allowed to enter the building. Over the portico, on a slab of marble, was affixed, in letters of gold, fashioned by an artisan in the old world, the word "Chrysanthos."

"It is the name of the house," said the islanders, and asked each other the meaning of the strange word.

Ill-nature suggested that the word had an evil signification, but one more learned than the rest discovered that the word was Greek.

"And its meaning?" asked the ill-natured ones.

“ The gold-flower.”

This gave consistency to the device of the letters over the portico, each one of which was fashioned in the shape of a flower.

So much being done, something still remained which fanned into a fire the sentiment of repulsion for the hunchback by which the islanders were originally animated towards him. The house being built and the grounds laid out, it became necessary to hide them. By means of thick fences, close hedges, and trees, Ranf succeeded in shutting out both house and ground entirely from the view of passers-by. A proceeding so unusual excited something like anger in the breasts of the islanders. It was as though the hunchback had said, “ There is nothing in common between us. You and I are apart from each other.” In this sense they accepted it. He had thrown down, in a manner peculiarly offensive to them, a glove which they picked up. From that moment they looked upon Ranf with complete aversion and distrust.

He did not complain. He had never courted their favour, and he cared not that it was withheld from him. He had accomplished his wishes. In his beautiful house he was as completely cut off from his fellow-beings, as he was in his huts on the mountain of snow.

A common roadway ran past the frontage of his freehold, and in Ranf's goings to and fro he was in the habit of meeting the islanders, who had used the path for generations. Between him and them no greeting was ever exchanged. Children stood aside to allow him to pass; women held their garments close to them, so that they should not come in contact with his. The familiar path ran parallel with the right bank of the Valley of Lilies, and so determined now were the islanders to avoid all association with the hunchback, that they cut another path on the left bank. The old roadway immediately fell into disuse. "Avoid it," was the tacit and universal resolve. No surer sign could have been given of the deep antagonism which existed between Ranf and the inhabitants of the Silver Isle.

After all these years, he was more than ever an alien from the sympathies of his fellows.

But, with a soul that loved beauty, that worshipped it silently in every form, Ranf turned this circumstance to advantage. He clothed the old roadway with wild flowers, and Nature, benign and beneficent, gracious to one and all alike, was soon seen here in her most beautiful aspect. Ranf's freehold literally lay embosomed in a bed of brightest form and colour.

The only human beings who still held to Ranf were Evangeline, Bertha, and the Sylvesters. It was singular that neither Evangeline nor any member of the Sylvester family had been asked by Ranf to visit his new possession. Bertha was the only person permitted to enter and roam about at will, and out of this circumstance had grown the trouble which now hung over the hunchback's head.

There were some on the isle to whose minds, in their strong dislike of him, Ranf was a nettle. "It reflects shame upon us," they thought, "that such a man should be

allowed to live among us. Some evil will fall upon the land if we do not rid ourselves of him." But this could not be accomplished by any action of theirs. Ranf had now as strong a claim to residence as themselves. He had purchased land of them, and it was his for ever. The more they thought of this, the more it galled them; the sharper grew the nettle's point. Their only chance of ridding themselves of his hateful presence lay in the hope that some discovery might be made respecting him which would compel him voluntarily to quit the isle.

They questioned the captain of the *White Dove*.

"How is it," they asked, "that your ship is engaged only in carrying out the wishes of the hunchback?"

For at no time had the captain of the *White Dove* endeavoured to trade on his own account with the islanders. Its visits were regular, and it never came without bringing a number of packages and cases for Ranf.

"It is easily answered," said the cap-

tain. "The hunchback is the owner of my ship."

"Is he a master it is creditable to serve?"

"Decidedly he is. I know nothing against him. Hark ye, masters. It would be well if there were more in the world like him."

"You would fill the earth with deformity," they exclaimed, in wonder. "Have you a daughter?"

"Three."

"Would you allow such a man to marry a child of yours?"

"Heaven forbid! But that does not prevent me from pitying him for his misfortune, nor from doing justice to him. Take a lesson from my book, masters. You are no more perfect than other men."

"You are warm in your defence. What binds you so closely to the hunchback?"

"First, self-interest. Second, he is good to the poor."

"In what way?"

"In this. There is never a day upon which I bid farewell that he does not place

in my hand a packet of gold, saying, ‘Use this for the unfortunate;’ and would you believe—no, perhaps you would not—that he never asks for an account? Are my reasons sufficient?”

“Yes,” they answered, and were inclined to waver; but only for a short time. Their prejudice against Ranf was too strong to be blown away by the words of a man who confessed he served his master from motives of self-interest.

The captain of the *White Dove* reported this conversation to Ranf. The hunchback smiled.

“They are right in their way,” he said, “and I in mine; but all roads are not alike. One day it may be otherwise between them and me.”

Thus matters went on until within a few weeks of Mauvain’s return to the Silver Isle.

At this time a circumstance was brought to the knowledge of the islanders which caused them to assemble and determine upon a course of action with respect to the hunchback.

Not even to the Sylvesters was it known

that Bertha was free of the hunchback's house, and was in the habit of visiting it. The discovery was led up to by a curious-monger who had long been tormented by a desire to obtain a glimpse of the mysterious residence. He selected a dark night for his purpose, and as he was reconnoitring, endeavouring to find a means of ingress to the grounds, he was startled by the appearance of a woman evidently familiar with the place. He followed her stealthily, and made his way into the garden. The windows of the house were lighted up, and after a little while he saw a shadow not to be mistaken—the shadow of Ranf. Carefully concealing himself, he waited and watched, and presently his patience was rewarded by the appearance of Ranf and the woman he had followed at one of the windows.

Here, in truth, was a strange discovery. The intruder was a young man, unacquainted with Bertha, and he could not see the woman's face, but the circumstance of any woman being seen in such a place was sufficient to disturb him. It was a matter

that should not be kept secret, and he resolved to make it known on the following day. He did not intend, however, to depart from the grounds, without an endeavour to see something of them. He moved about cautiously, and coming suddenly upon a marble statue, which for a moment he believed to be a spectre, he uttered a loud cry of alarm. It was heard within the house, and the next moment Ranf, accompanied by Bertha, came from the house to ascertain the cause of the alarm. The man, fearful for his life, crouched and held his breath, and by good fortune escaped detection. Ranf held in his hand a lighted torch, which he raised above his head; he walked in almost every direction but the one in which the intruder lay concealed; Bertha kept close to the hunchback's side.

"I see nothing," said Ranf; "but the voice I heard was human."

"There are spirits," whispered Bertha.

"They do not speak," said Ranf. "You seem afraid."

"I am frightened of shadows."

“We will go in, then. Do not tremble; there is nothing to fear.” And together they re-entered the house.

The man breathed more freely, and the fear of detection gone, he determined not to depart until he had to some extent satisfied his curiosity. It was not possible to obtain a satisfactory view until there was a light in the sky; he would wait; the moon would rise in an hour.

Gradually the light crept over the grounds, and the man was filled with wonder at the beauty by which he was surrounded. The loveliest flowers were blooming, fountains were playing, and marble statues, partly concealed by the foliage, were strangely touched by the moon's light.

“No wonder I thought it was a living form,” he muttered.

His idle curiosity grew into a fever. This foretaste of wonders filled him with a burning desire for further discovery. He approached closer to the house, forgetting that the moon was full upon him. Suddenly the door opened, and Ranf

appeared on the threshold. The man stood still as stone as the hunchback slowly approached him.

"Your business?" demanded the hunchback in a low tone.

The man was too terrified to reply.

"Your business?" cried Ranf again, and, no answer being given, stepped swiftly into the house, and reappeared, holding by the collar a dog quite three feet in height, and of a breed strange to the Silver Isle.

"I have but to move my finger," said Ranf, "and you would be torn to pieces. Answer quickly. Are you alone?"

"Yes."

"Your business, then?" for the third time demanded Ranf.

"I have none."

"What brought you here?"

"Curiosity."

"Is it satisfied?"

"Quite. Once I get safe out of this place, you may depend I shall never set foot in it again."

"I warn you to keep your word. I

will show you an easy way out of my grounds. Walk before me."

The man was about to obey, when Ranf noticed a sudden light in his eyes, which were directed towards the portal. Turning, to ascertain what had caused this flash of newly-awakened intelligence, Ranf saw that Bertha was standing on the threshold. A peculiar smile crossed the hunchback's lips as he looked again at the intruder.

"How long have you been in my grounds?"

"For two or three hours."

"Ah! You were here before the moon rose, when I came out with a lighted torch in my hand?"

"I was."

"And the woman who stands there was by my side."

"Yes."

"How did you gain admittance here?"

"I followed the woman."

"It was a manly action. You seemed surprised to see her here."

"My looks expressed my thought."

"Perhaps you would like to speak to her."

“ I have no wish.”

“ Were you sent here ? ”

“ No.”

“ It was idle curiosity that brought you.”

“ Yes.”

“ You are singularly fascinated by the woman there. What attracts you in her ? ”

“ She is dressed strangely.”

“ But with taste ; admit that.”

“ If you wish me to admit it, I do so.”

“ And having stolen here from idle curiosity, you have made a discovery.”

“ Yes.”

“ Does any person besides ourselves know of your intrusion here to-night ? ”

“ No one.”

The hunchback's eyes searched his soul.

“ You speak the truth. Do you not see the peril in which you stand ? You have made a discovery which you intend to use to my prejudice. Do not attempt to deny it.”

“ I do not deny it ; as for its being to

your prejudice, that is as it may turn out."

"Exactly. But the jury are empannelled, the judge is sitting. It has been so for years. Nay, the very verdict—'Guilty!'—is on their tongue, no evidence being required. Of what good action could a hunchback be capable? You are in peril, I say."

"I am no longer afraid," said the man, who was not really a coward. "We are man and man."

"You do me the justice to believe that I would not use the strength of this animal against you? You are truly gracious. We are, as you say, man and man—and I thank you again for putting me on a level with yourself. But in the inference you draw, you would find yourself grievously in error. I have the strength of four such men as you. I could kill you where you stand, and none would be the wiser."

With a sudden movement, the hunchback grasped the man's body, so that he could not move a limb, and raised him high above his head; as suddenly he

released the man, and set him safely down.

“ I give you your life, without conditions. Use your discovery. Now, walk before me, without another word, and quit my place.”

CHAPTER IV.

RANF APPEARS BEFORE HIS JUDGES.

WHEN the interloper was clear of Ranf's house, he felt as if he had escaped from prison, but once beyond the Valley of Lilies and out of immediate danger, the enchantment returned, and it seemed to him that he must have had a glimpse of the domain of a magician. At the same time he was animated by a feeling of resentment towards Ranf. He glowed with indignation at the affront to which Ranf had subjected him, not thinking that he had offered sufficient cause for it. It was in a tone of scornful defiance that Ranf had said, "Use your discovery." He was a young man, eager for revenge, and not being cast in too generous a mould, he used it to Ranf's disadvantage. He did not make it public. He sought advice from a high authority in the isle, who, upon hearing the strange

story, enjoined upon him the advisability of not babbling about it.

"It affects the well-being of the community," said the elder, "and until the truth is ascertained, must not be too freely discussed."

"The truth is as I have spoken."

"There is no reason to distrust you, but your senses may have been deceived. You say you do not know the woman you saw with Ranf."

"I did not recognize her; her face was not distinctly visible."

"She must be a woman of the isle."

"Yes—if she is mortal."

His interlocutor smiled, having no belief in the supernatural.

"It shall be inquired into. In the meantime, be discreet."

The matter was confided to six of the elders, who, in their deliberations, found themselves ever at a loss when the subject of the woman was introduced.

"It was not possible," they said, "that, unknown to them, Ranf could have brought a female into the isle."

Ranf was intimate with only three women among them—the Sylvesters and Evangeline. In their perplexity they sent for Matthew Sylvester. He listened to the story in silence.

“Your suspicion,” he said, “points to one of the members of my household; but to my certain knowledge not one was absent from our home on the night of the adventure.”

This added to the complication, and they determined that the hunchback should be called upon for an explanation. A summons was prepared in the following terms:

“To him known as Ranf:

“It has come to our knowledge that you are harbouring in your house a woman of the Silver Isle. In this, unless our informant is labouring under a delusion, the honour of the isle is concerned. You are amenable to our laws, which we shall not permit to be violated, and we call upon you to appear before us, and render a clear account of yourself. If you refuse, we shall know what course to take.”

To this was appended the day and hour on which Ranf was expected to appear, and the signatures of the elders.

Who was to deliver the summons? It was necessary that Ranf should receive it personally, so that he might not have the excuse of ignorance to fall back upon. In this difficulty Matthew Sylvester offered himself.

“I will deliver the summons, and will bring back Ranf’s reply.”

He sought the hunchback that very day, and found him.

Ranf read the summons thoughtfully, and said,—

“They are careful of their honour. What course will they take if I refuse to attend?”

“You will be banished from the isle.”

“That would please them; but I will not give them the opportunity. So long as I keep within the law, they cannot touch me. I acknowledge their authority, and will obey the summons, on one condition. It is a condition I have a right to make.”

“Name it. If it is just, they will not object.”

“It is just. They say that I am harbouring a woman of the isle. If it be so, the woman is to be judged as well as I.”

“That is so. She will be judged.”

“It is right that she should be judged in my company. Tell them to amend the summons, so that it shall include all who are guilty. Women are weak creatures, and I may be better able to speak for this one than she for herself.”

“Your condition will doubtless be complied with.”

“Make them my full submission in all matters in which their honour is at stake. They will, perhaps, also grant me a little grace. Being on my trial, I have to prepare my defence. The summons is somewhat too sudden; let it be fixed for two days later than the day named herein.”

“There will be no difficulty,” said Matthew Sylvester, and prepared to depart; but Ranf detained him.

“ You have not too high an opinion of me, Matthew Sylvester.”

“ I have never spoken against you, and I have often thought of you with sincere compassion.”

“ I thank you. In the earlier years of my life I suffered much from the injustice of men. I am not above advancing a claim to your compassion ; but only to you and yours would I make such admission. It has often brought balm to my soul to think that in one house within this isle I was not regarded as an accursed thing.”

“ You have not been so regarded in my household. There are those there who love you.”

“ You do not speak for yourself ? ”

“ No ; when I have been drawn towards you, something has held me back. Frankly, I have had my doubts of you.”

“ And have them ? ”

“ And have them.”

“ I had no need to ask the question ; I can read men fairly well. That you have doubts, and that at the present time they

are strengthened, is proved by your reticence with respect to the matter of this summons. Personally, you have not asked me a single question with respect to the charge—not a light one—which is now brought against me.”

“I came to perform a duty,” replied Matthew, “not to pry into another man’s conscience.”

“That is well said. Yet, when we take an interest in a man, we are not generally careless of what affects him. You can read between the lines, and can understand that I am anxious for your good will.”

Matthew was silent.

“Matthew Sylvester,” continued the hunchback, after a pause, “years ago you and I had a conversation upon a subject near to your heart.”

“I remember; it related to my son’s wife, Margaret, and the sister who was torn from her.”

“Her sister Clarice.”

“Yes.”

“There is a secret concerning that sister

which you and I share ; it has been safe in my keeping."

"And in mine."

"Events are taking a strange course. Within these hundred hours I have traced in the air the writing of fate. You are about to quit your house."

"It has been mine by courtesy only. Its master has arrived, to take possession of his own. Another house is now being built for us."

"I know. You have never seen this Mauvain ?"

"Never."

"He is not alone. There comes with him a friend, a sculptor, Harold by name, whom also you have never seen ?"

"Not to my knowledge."

"Yet the lines of his life and of those lives most dear to you have crossed, and may cross again. If this latter happen, I shall be no passive spectator, and what action I may take will be in the interests of those you love. There was a time when you were inclined to be friendly towards me."

“I am still so inclined ; but you have made such a desire most difficult of accomplishment.”

“It is my way, and men must take me as I am.”

“I perceive your drift, and I will endeavour to satisfy you. Is the charge in this summons true ?”

“To what extent ?”

“That there lives in your house a woman of the Silver Isle ?”

“It is true. And you and others near to you shall judge from evidence, not from hearsay, how far I have stained the honour of the isle. I make, therefore, still another stipulation which you will convey to those who sent you to me. I ask that you and your children, Paul and Margaret Sylvester, shall be present at the examination. You will come ?”

“Yes, if we are allowed.”

“I shall insist upon it. You can then be witnesses of my disgrace.”

Matthew Sylvester related to the islanders the particulars of his interview with the hunchback, and all that the ac-

cused man demanded was granted without demur.

At the appointed time there were assembled in the court-house twelve magistrates of the Silver Isle, prepared to hear the explanation Ranf had to give. There were also present the three elder members of the Sylvester family whom Ranf stipulated should be present, the man who had given the information against the hunchback, and Harold, who came straight from the ship lying at anchor in the bay. On this day the court was closed to the public, and two officers standing at the door allowed only those to enter to whom permission had been given. As Harold entered a delicate perfume spread itself through the hall; he was exquisitely dressed and gloved, and with a purposed affectation gave himself the airs of a dandy. He was really curious regarding the proceedings about to take place, but the impression he conveyed was that he had come to an entertainment which had been prepared for his amusement, and that he was graciously willing, in an idle way, to be amused.

When he entered Margaret Sylvester was talking to Matthew, and their backs towards him. He bowed to the court, and taking the seat allotted to him, arranged himself upon it with an easy grace. This done, he allowed his eyes to wander from face to face, until they rested on the face of Margaret Sylvester. "By Heaven!" he thought, but it was a discovery of so much interest that his lips formed the unspoken words; "the woman with the voice of the nightingale!" As the thought crossed his mind, Margaret's eyes met his, and were held spell-bound. Her face grew white, and her bosom rose and fell. "Harold," thought the sculptor, still silently addressing himself, "the Silver Isle promises to be prolific of sensation. There is a future before you." Matthew Sylvester, observing Margaret's agitation, stepped to the president's side, and whispered a few words to him.

"Friends," said the president aloud, with a motion of his hand towards Harold, "this gentleman is a friend of Mauvain, who will presently take up

his residence among us. His name is Harold."

Harold rose and bowed with infinite grace, murmuring,—

"Very much at your service. I trust we shall be friends."

They all bent their heads, with the exception of Margaret, who, at the sound of his voice, closed her eyes, like one in a dream.

"We expected Mauvain," said the president.

"He desired me," said Harold, in his softest tones, "to present his regrets that he is unable to attend. He suffers frightfully whenever the slightest demand for exertion is made upon him. He comes of an old family; his complaints, his vices, his virtues are hereditary, and consequently he is scarcely accountable for them. New men do not understand that such as Mauvain are made of finer stuff than they. I speak to men of sense who will appreciate the truth of what I say." What his hearers did appreciate was the tone of exquisite polish in which

he spoke. "Mauvain," continued Harold, "regrets his absence the more because it prevents him from witnessing a scene so remarkable as this. It is years since he saw his friend the hunchback, and it would have been a happiness to him could he have personally attended, and testified to the virtues of a creature so interesting. Should it be the hunchback's fate to fall under your displeasure, it will grieve Mauvain sorely. But doubtless it will be my good fortune to describe to my friend how completely the stranger whom, for his sake, you welcomed to your isle, has cleared himself of any charge you may bring against him. He has but his virtues to recommend him. Little enough; but man is frail, and we must not bear too hard on imperfection. I myself have erred"—his eyes rested here on Margaret's face—"and am disposed to be lenient."

"We accept you as Mauvain's representative," said the president, coldly. "You shall see that we know how to dispense justice."

“Who can doubt it?” murmured Harold, sinking languidly into his seat as the hunchback entered the court.

Ranf’s entrance was opportune; it was as though he had timed this dialogue to the moment. He was accompanied by a woman, muffled from head to foot in a scarlet cloak, the hood of which covered her head, and concealed her features. All eyes were turned to her, but she stood, evidently in accordance with instructions, by Ranf’s side, with her head inclined to the ground. Harold was the only person in whose eager gaze there was not something of pain. “Dramatic,” he murmured; “very dramatic. A touch of art.”

For full a minute Ranf and Harold gazed steadily at each other. Harold’s face expressed amusement; Ranf’s contempt.

“Decidedly,” thought Harold, “the hunchback is not of a forgiving nature. He harbours resentment, and has grown even more stunted and ill-favoured.”

At this point a disturbance occurred, which claimed attention. One of the officers of the court informed the president

that a man demanded admittance, and would not be denied.

“What authority has he for intrusion?” asked the president.

“This,” replied the officer, presenting a paper to the court.

It proved to be a letter from Ranf, requesting the bearer’s presence in a case reflecting upon the honour of his family. The letter was addressed to Daniel Christof, a name well known and once honoured in the Silver Isle. At the utterance of this name by the president, the draped figure at Ranf’s side shuddered, but Ranf’s strong hand upon her shoulder restrained any further expression of emotion.

“Is this your writing?” asked the president of Ranf, holding out the letter.

“It is,” replied Ranf.

“Is Daniel Christof’s presence necessary for your vindication?”

“I deem it both just and necessary that he should be witness of these proceedings.”

“Admit him,” said the president to the officer.

There entered an old man, wild-looking

and haggard, bent down by age and suffering. His form was spare, his hands long and thin, and in his blue eyes dwelt a wandering look which never for longer than a moment rested upon any one object.

“My crooked friend,” thought Harold, as he contemplated the grouping, “has an eye for effect. This composition would do credit to an artist.”

“Daniel Christof,” said the president, with much pity in his voice, “you are here by no wish of those who loved and honoured you. We, who have ever sympathized with your deep misfortunes, would have left you in your solitude to work out your peace with Heaven. But your presence is demanded by one who stands before us for justice.”

Daniel Christof raised his hands with a trembling motion, indicating that he heard and understood; but he uttered no word.

“The court now empannelled,” said the president, addressing Ranf, “has full authority over the affairs of the isle. We

received you among us in good faith, and gave you welcome. Such welcome, although it is not imbued with the spirit we would desire—a fault not ours—will not be withdrawn, if it is made apparent to us that you have not transgressed our laws. Indeed, it cannot be withdrawn without full and ample cause. We would mete out to you even a larger toleration than we would accord to each other. But you stand within our jurisdiction, and it is in our power to banish you from the isle, being a stranger living in our land by courtesy, should it be proved that you have brought disgrace and dishonour upon one of our people. You may recognize the justice of my words.”

“They are words,” said Ranf, “I myself should use, were I in your place and you in mine.”

“If that is an indication of the spirit in which you meet us, we shall not underrate its value in the task before us. It happens, fortunately or otherwise, that at this juncture the two men who are responsible for your presence on the Silver Isle, have come

among us, and one is present here to-day. It may be that he will use his influence on your behalf."

"I do not need it," said Ranf, with a quiet scorn. "I can plead my own cause. Let your accusation be plain and to the point, as my answer shall be. I shall listen with patience, however hard your words and suspicions. In return, I shall expect that you will listen with patience to what I shall have to say."

"You shall have no reason to complain. Listen now to the statement which has occasioned these proceedings."

Thereupon the president gave a minute and clear account of the visit of the young islander to the hunchback's grounds, and of his experiences during the night of his visit. From time to time Ranf nodded his head in confirmation of the truth of the relation, and when it was finished, said,—

"There is nothing to dispute; the statement is correct, so far as it is in my power to vouch for it, and the omission of one trifling detail does not affect it

—in my estimation, although it may in yours.”

“Supply the omission,” said the president, “before you answer the charge. Trifling as it is, it may be of importance.”

“As you will; although I repeat that in strict justice it should not affect your decision. When I confronted the man who had unwarrantably stolen into my grounds, and could not obtain from him a satisfactory answer to my question as to what brought him there, I called to my side a dog which, with other animals and birds, I have imported. I perceive that the man who gives evidence against me calls this dog a savage beast; whereas in fact he is but a dog, a singularly gentle creature, as harmless as an infant when not molested. He has, it is true, a vice—the vice of faithfulness; he would not patiently see his master hurt, and one word from me is sufficient to rouse in him a fury more powerful than mortal’s. During our interview my faithful servant stood quietly by my side, yet I had but to whisper the word, and the man’s life would not have been worth a

moment's purchase. The word was not spoken, and your brave islander departed in safety. There is something more. I myself have more than an ordinary man's strength; I gave my ill-wisher a proof of this, being careful not to hurt so tender a being. I knew that no person on the isle was acquainted with his mission; he told me as much, and I read the truth in his face. Therefore I could have killed him, and none, even if they suspected, could have brought the crime home to me; for I am wary when occasion demands, and, in cunning, the equal of straighter men. It might occur to some of you that, had I anything to conceal which I was fearful of being discovered, I, a suspected, morose being, ungainly, unfriendly, hating and hated, whose life was linked to yours by no possible link of sympathy, who had lived among you shunned and avoided, who never by look or word courted your favour, who was, indeed, as disdainful of you as you were of him, who offended you by refusing to join in your religious observances, who would not eat with you or

drink with you, who in the regulation of his life acknowledged no law but his own—it might, I say, occur to some of you that, had I anything to fear which this one man could bring to light, I would have swept him from this world into the next without remorse, without pity. But I had no such prompting; angered as I was, I spared his life, and allowed him to depart in absolute safety. It is a small detail, but I scorn to accept it in my favour. I stand upon my right, and no small side-issues shall help to prove my guilt or innocence. I know where you are weak, and where you are strong. I know how cruel and kind, how merciless and merciful, how pitiless and just you are, and I am content that you shall be my judges on the broad lines of right and wrong.”

“This crooked man,” thought Harold, “has proved himself an artist, perfect in colour and composition. The scarlet cloak on that woman by his side is most effective; he must have studied all the accessories of his picture. He proves himself now to be

a special pleader of whom civilized courts might be proud. What next ? ”

Upon the others Ranf's unstudied address had a powerful effect. It almost seemed as though he were the judge, and they the persons who were to be judged.

CHAPTER V.

THE ACQUITTAL.

“WE admit the fairness of your correction,” said the president, “and also of your rebuke. When we discover that we have wronged you, we shall make acknowledgment of the wrong.”

“I expect no less,” said Ranf; “there are those present whose good opinion I desire.”

“Not mine, surely,” thought Harold. “He takes high ground, this twisted mortal.”

“Proceed now to your defence,” said the president.

“Nay,” said the hunchback, “it is first for you to state of what I am accused.”

“It is stated on the summons. You are accused of harbouring a woman of the isle.”

“To the hurt of the honour of the isle, unless I mistake.”

“It is so.”

“Does not my form answer you? Look well upon me. Is it likely that I could ever win a woman’s love?”

“He can read the minds of men,” thought Harold. “A woman’s love! Hard to gain. But we live in an age of miracles.”

“That is not the question,” said the president; “strange tales are told, and strange ideas held by many concerning you, although you may rest assured that we, your judges, place but little value upon idle rumour.”

“I am glad to know it. If it be proved that I, with no unworthy intent, have given shelter to the unfortunate, how shall I stand in your eyes?”

“Acquitted, and entitled to our gratitude. The laws of humanity, administered with a pure intent, are sacred.”

“So do I regard them; and a man’s ungraceful shape and uncouth manners should not tell against him. Justice is

blind ; she sees not whether a man be rich or poor, crooked or straight. Despite your assurances, I am impelled by my experiences to warn you to be careful that you are not led away by the prejudice which exists against me. I have heard some of the tales and ideas you speak of, and have laughed at them, wondering, too, that they should have gained a hold upon the men of the Silver Isle, who pride themselves upon their common sense and reason. But it proves you human—and fallible. The woman of the isle whom I am accused of harbouring, to her dishonour, stands by my side. Do not forget that in this accusation you are flinging a shameful stone upon one of yourselves ; if it strike her it wounds her not, for it touches not her honour ; it recoils upon those who accuse her. If upon this isle there is a home despoiled by me, the particulars of the deed could scarcely be hidden from you. Know you of a man who mourns the loss of wife or daughter, and cries to you for justice on me, the wronger ? ”

“ We know of no such man.”

“How vague, then, is the charge you bring against me! You make me a witness against myself. If I am guilty, I must bring my own guilt to light. You shall not say of me that I thwart the course of justice.”

With his own hand he removed the scarlet cloak and hood from the woman at his side, and Bertha stood revealed. They gazed at her in surprise, and then at Daniel Christof in compassion ; but of them all he was the one man among them who was unmoved. His eyes rested on his daughter's face without a sign of love or recognition. She met his gaze mournfully, but did not move towards him. She was strangely and beautifully dressed in laces, silks, and jewels of great value. Bracelets of pearls were on her arms, and a diamond cross at her neck. None of these ornaments were new ; they all bore upon them the stamp of an old fashion. The only motion she made was to raise the cross to her lips, and keep it there for a little while in one long clinging kiss.

Harold scrutinized her with curiosity.

“A fair woman,” he thought; “beautiful once, beautiful now, and most wonderfully attired. The court of a king could show nothing finer. That expression of sorrow in her eyes is native to her; she has seen trouble.” Harold was puzzled and interested. For a moment an idea had occurred to him that the woman might be Evangeline, but a glance dispelled the mingled dread and hope. He continued his musings: “Ranf has come well prepared. His plot is a succession of surprises. Already has he turned the tables upon his judges. Those jewels and laces are his. How did he obtain possession of them? Is there a fairy palace in the Silver Isle?”

“Here,” said Ranf, “is the woman I am said to have wronged. Whom have I robbed? A father of his child? Let him take her to his breast.”

As he spoke these words he looked straight into the face of Daniel Christof, and advanced a step towards him.

Daniel Christof rose slowly from his seat.

“ I have no child,” he said, in a cold, passionless voice.

“ This woman’s name,” said Ranf, “ is Bertha Christof.”

“ Bertha Christof is dead,” said Daniel Christof, in the same metallic tone.

“ It is false ! ” retorted Ranf ; “ she lives, and stands before you.”

“ It matters not. I have no child.”

“ Had such a crime as this,” said Ranf, addressing the elders, “ been laid at my door—had an innocent being of my own blood, to whom I owed a duty of love and gentle guidance, been by me thrust from her home, and I was called upon to answer the desertion—I should have humbled myself before you, and without one word in self-defence have called upon you to pass judgment upon me. You are welcome to entertain what harsh thoughts you please against me ; I can bear them. But when you point the finger of shame at an innocent being who cannot defend herself, whose sensitive soul shrinks at an unkind word, you proclaim yourselves, unless you make full atonement, devoid of chivalry,

religion, and grace. Such a crime as lies upon that old man's soul lies not upon mine, and I am not called upon to answer it. My crime is that I have held out the hand of friendship, that I have given the word of sympathy, to a forsaken woman, whose kith and kin would have left her to starve."

"That is not true," said the president, sternly; "no living creature need starve in this land of plenty. The guiltiest can obtain food for the asking."

"Pardon me," retorted Ranf, with a fine irony, "I forgot myself. I thought for a moment that other food than bread was needed for life and reason; that to a delicately nurtured woman some mark of sympathy, some word of gentleness, some look of kindness, were a necessity of her being—the want of which can only be supplied by a merciful dispensation which deprives her of her wits. That is the good fortune which has overtaken Bertha Christof; she is not full-witted, and has but one hope in this world or the next—a hope that lies in the grave of a child. To whom, then, is she responsible, and to

whom am I? If she is no man's daughter, I have wronged no man, even were I guilty of a wrong, which I am not. In years gone by you passed judgment upon this woman. Question now your hearts as to the justice of the punishment you meted out to her."

"We have our laws," said the president; "the woman sinned."

"She did not sin; she erred, being a weak, trusting woman, and in this respect your laws are cruel and merciless. Before the man whose child she is lay a straight path of merciful duty. Her mother, as Daniel Christof knows—you see now why I called him here to-day, although the whole of my purpose is not yet disclosed—was yielding, gentle, and timorous."

"We would have you remember," interrupted the president, in a gentle tone, "that the man you summoned here from his life of solitude has already suffered much."

"And I would have you remember that the woman you summoned here from her lonely life has suffered a martyrdom. My

pity is for the weak, not for the strong; for the innocent, not for the guilty. Bertha's mother was a woman whose plastic mind was ready to receive, without question, the law of right and wrong from the lips of those she loved. That she had neither wisdom nor strength was Nature's doing. She died young, but not before she had transmitted her weakest qualities to a daughter, whose heart and mind are not of the Spartan order. As well blame me for my shape as Bertha Christof for faith and tenderness. You have done the one, avoid the other injustice. This faith and this tenderness were sufficient to destroy the happiness of her life. Was balm poured upon her wounds? Was one pitiful hand held out to her? No; those who should have comforted her stricken soul heaped fire upon her, and added shame to shame. You cast her out from among you; her father drove her from her home. And this was justice! You pray in your churches that you shall not be led into temptation, and you strike with a merciless hand the woman who was so

innocently led, and was not endowed with strength to resist. By accident I met her. When? Years ago, at midnight. Where? In the great market-place of the isle in which the statue of Evangeline is set up. A strange time and a strange place for such a meeting, seeing what it has led to."

He paused and looked first at Margaret Sylvester and then at Harold. His action had the effect of drawing the attention of Margaret and Harold, each upon the other; it was as if he were the link between the two, to draw them together, or keep them apart.

"Decidedly," thought Harold, "the hunchback is a clever comedian, and has scenes in the background from which, when the time suits him, he will draw the curtain. Does he intend that I shall play an active part in his comedy?"

"It may be a satisfaction to you," said the president to Ranf, "to be informed that we are disposed to believe you speak the truth; we do not take into account your manner of expressing it, nor the bearing you adopt towards ourselves. We

accept it as natural in you. But nothing must be concealed from us."

"You ask too much," said Ranf, with a scornful smile; "I do not intend to bare my heart to you. What is necessary in this inquiry shall be told; nothing more. It is barely possible that there are points touching the present scene, but not immediately connected with it, nor of consequence in its clear explanation, which affect others present besides myself. Therefore I must be guarded, and intend to be. Be assured of this; whatever I may say, however I may act, I shall not stray from the path of right and justice."

"You had," said the president, "a purpose in view when you went to the market-place at midnight, years ago as you say, and there by accident first met Bertha Christof."

"A definite purpose," replied the hunchback; "I went to examine closely the statue of Evangeline there set up. To what end I do not consider myself at liberty to explain. I chose the hour of midnight so that I might be undisturbed. I call upon

Matthew Sylvester, in confirmation of my statement. He will remember a certain conversation which took place between us at the foot of the mountain. It was of his own seeking. The message sent to me by one of my white doves ran in this wise : 'Grandfather Matthew wishes to see the master of the mountain. He will be at its foot an hour before sunrise to-morrow.' I ask him if he remembers it."

"I remember the occasion," said Matthew Sylvester, "and the message ; the words, no doubt are correct."

"You remember, too, the conversation ?"

"I do."

"Bearing in mind that I had never cast more than a casual glance at the statue of Evangeline, can you trace from our conversation any motive I may have had for a closer inspection ?"

"It appears to me reasonable that you had such a motive."

"I thank you. Answer me now this question. Would you consent that in this assembly I should relate circumstantially the purport of our conversation ?"

Matthew Sylvester glanced apprehensively at Margaret, and she, magnetized into fear, caught his hand with a convulsive movement.

“Calm yourself, Margaret,” he said; “you shall know all when we are private; I have done wrong in concealing it from you so long.”

“I leave the disclosure to your own discretion,” said Ranf; “what was agreed upon between us was for the purpose of keeping sorrow from an innocent heart. But I am on my trial, and you have not answered my question. Do you consent that I shall relate here the purport of our conversation?”

“I do not consent.”

“Therefore my lips are sealed, and wisely sealed, for a more fitting time will come. I went, then, to the market-place and met Bertha Christof. Cut off from human companionship and sympathy, it was a habit of hers to seek companionship and sympathy from an image of marble. Even the cold stone was kinder to her than those among whom she had been

reared, for she talked to it, and confided her griefs to the inanimate ear, and believed that the marble lips uttered words of love to her bruised heart. I did not undeceive her—not I; it was a sweet and comforting delusion, and I allowed her to rest in it. We contracted a friendship that night, which has lasted till to-day, which will last till we draw our last breath. She would have fled from me had I been like other men, but my hump served me a good turn for once. Everything has its use. She paid me a doubtful compliment. ‘You are not a man,’ she said, ‘for you do not speak as others do.’ And yet I spoke no word to her that did not express sympathy. She looked upon it as strange that there were people in this isle who abhorred me (her own words), and that I was the only one who had given her a kind word since her baby died. She asked me so many questions, without giving me time to answer them, and disclosed to me so much that was sorrowful, that I was drawn irresistibly to her. She took me to the grave of her baby, and I left her

kneeling by it, and kissing the earth, and whispering to her child. We met again, and then she confided to me her story. It was pitiful ! pitiful ! If my heart was ever inclined to you, the story I heard was sufficient to draw me back. You have your laws, and you measured out justice to this poor woman because she had sinned in error. You forgot that mercy is the divinest quality of earthly justice ! Would you believe that the ignorant child found fault with your priests, who, telling her in words that God is love, strove to prove to her by their action, that He is hate ! As for her father, let him not hope that by fasting and praying and isolation he can escape Divine condemnation for his guilt ! Let him listen now to what his daughter said to me, a stranger, out of the deep tribulation of her suffering soul. She had a fantastic idea that she and the marble image of Evangeline would know each other better in the spirit-land. Then she would have her baby in her arms again, she said, in the fulness of her love and hope. And when in that land her

father should say to her, 'Come to me, my daughter; all is forgiven!' she might reply, 'Had you been merciful to me, my baby might have lived, and I should not have been condemned to wander night after night and day after day from valley to valley, from field to field, with a bleeding heart, which one kind word from you would have relieved!' Let him think of those words, when from this court he goes back to his solitude. What happened between Bertha Christof and myself after that? The friendship we contracted was strengthened by time, and we met again and again. It is my happiness to know that I was a solace to her, and that in all likelihood I prevented her from falling into utter despair. I address you as your equal, being at least that. I hold land in your isle, and have a right to live upon it so long as it pleases me. I have done nothing to entitle you to deprive me of my right. If you desire a further reason for the intimacy between me and the woman upon whom you would cast a mantle of shame, I can supply it. Within my freehold lies the only spot of earth

this woman loves, the only memory upon which she feeds her soul. The grave of her child is there, unconsecrated by priests, consecrated by a mother's love. That grave is her hope, her church, her refuge, her religion ! The innocent dust that lies within the earth is witness of her purity. And for myself," said the hunchback, with so much feeling that there was sweetness in his voice, "there lives upon the isle one whom I love so dearly that no allurement or temptation could woo me to a degrading act. Bertha Christof stands before you, a wronged and sinless woman, pure as when I first met her. She is my sister—and to me the preservation of her honour is a sacred trust. Do you know the signs of innocence ? Look in her face, and behold them !"

His hearers were much moved and wholly convinced, and the president of the court was about to speak in terms of acquittal of the charge which had been brought against him, when Ranf by a motion restrained him.

"There sits a man," he said, pointing to

Daniel Christof, "with blood upon his soul. When you regard the guilty with compassion, and the innocent with aversion, as you have done this day, by what sophistry can you justify yourselves?"

Daniel Christof, with trembling steps, advanced in the direction of his daughter.

"Bertha!" he cried, holding out his hands towards her.

Ranf fell back.

"Bertha!" again cried the old man; "come to me! Forgive me!"

But she turned from him, and stepping to the hunchback's side, took his hand in hers, and firmly held it for protection.

"Your father calls you," said Ranf gently.

"I have no father," replied Bertha; "I have only my child!"

Daniel Christof looked around for pity and support, but the faces of Ranf's judges were averted from him. Without another word, he staggered to the door, and passed out of the hall.

For a few moments silence reigned. Then the hunchback spoke again.

“There is still something more. To a woman I appeal. In the name of womanhood I address her. Let her for the purposes of justice suppose that one who was precious to her—it might be a sister, dearly loved, to whom she was a protector—was torn from her by treachery. Say that she feared and fears, though long years have passed, that a too confiding nature has been led to shame. She knows it not; the fate of that being, most dearly loved, is hidden from her. But if she learnt the bitter truth, and that sister were now to appear before her, would she take her to her arms, as in bygone days, and shed the light of love upon the aching heart? Would she press the hapless one to her breast, and whisper to her, ‘Find comfort here; take shelter here; though all the world condemn you, I will be true to you till death’?”

“Yes! yes!” cried Margaret Sylvester, rising, in uncontrollable agitation, while the eyes of all were fixed upon her in wonder.

“Here is one,” said Ranf, “falsely ac-

cused, who has been so betrayed. She has been sorely wounded! Man's bitter injustice has driven her mad; Heaven's mercy only has sustained her fainting soul! Pass you the verdict upon her. She will accept no other."

Margaret Sylvester glided swiftly to Bertha; she passed her arms about the neck of the outcast, and whispered, "Find comfort here! Take shelter here!" Bertha's head sank low upon Margaret's breast, her arms pressed Margaret close, and her tears flowed freely.

"The woman is judged," said Ranf to the elders. "Pass judgment upon me."

"We ask your pardon," said the president, as he and the others prepared to descend from their seats.

* * * * *

Five minutes later, and only Ranf and Harold remained in the court.

"You have acted grandly," said Harold. "Had I not witnessed it with my own eyes, I should never have believed it possible."

"I do not wonder. It is not easy to make you believe."

"No, it is not easy. The comedy was well rehearsed. Who directed it?"

"Fate; and sent you here to witness it."

"Producing first a revolution in my country to enable me to be present."

"Nothing more likely, if one believes in fate."

"You believe in it."

"I am beginning to do so."

"As fate's prime minister, now, what is to happen?"

"Retribution."

"Really! I shall be charmed to play my part in it. I trust it will have as appropriate an ending as the play I have just seen. Mauvain will be rarely amused at the description I shall give him of it."

"I have no doubt. You are good—at words. When does Mauvain land?"

"He hopes to do so in a very few days, and looks forward, with delighted anticipation to the renewal of an agreeable acquaintanceship. He has a high regard for you."

“It is reciprocated.”

“How long it is since we met—you and I! I have languished for a sight of you, wondering whether you were alive or dead, and whether Nature had made amends to you. Then there is another in whom I am interested, and of whom I have often thought.”

“You mean Evangeline.”

“Yes; that is the name. She whom I predicted would be hailed as the princess of the Silver Isle.”

“You have not seen her?”

“It has not been my good fortune.”

Ranf looked steadily at Harold, who laughed in his face.

“You appeared to be interested in Margaret Sylvester—as though you and she had met.”

“We may possibly have done so; I have met so many—and I am fond of dreaming. And you know—or can guess, being able to read me so well—that I cannot resist a beautiful woman. So, you have been interested in my poor statue of Evangeline, which they honoured me by setting up in

the market-place. I admit it, you see; it is mine, though no one knows it but you and I. Shall we keep the secret? I abhor adulation. What strikes you particularly in it? The composition? You yourself are a master of that, Ranf? Or the face? Frankness is a great fault of mine. You see a likeness in the face, perhaps. To whom?"

"You can name her."

"Well, to humour you—Clarice?"

"Yes, Clarice."

"Between you and me, hunchback, the fairest woman I have ever known. Will you accompany me to the ship, to shake hands with Mauvain? No? Perhaps it is as well. Adieu—till our next meeting. I must see that wonderful house of yours; I will take no denial."

CHAPTER VI.

THE OLD WOUND REOPENED.

DURING the following few weeks no person but Bertha saw or conversed with Ranf. It was understood throughout the Silver Isle, although the details of the trial were not made public, that a grave charge had been brought against the hunchback, of which he had completely cleared himself, and his judges had been generous enough to declare that in his answer to the charge Ranf had shown himself in an unexpectedly noble light. The character of these judges stood so high in the isle that implicit faith was placed in this declaration, the acceptance of which did much to clear away the prejudice which had existed against Ranf, and many of the islanders were anxious to make personal

acknowledgment of their error. The hunchback, however, did not afford them an opportunity; with his usual disregard of their opinion, in his favour or to his hurt, he kept aloof from them.

The one person most anxious to see and speak with him was Margaret Sylvester. The trial had torn open the old wound in her heart, and she felt that she could never again know peace until she had learnt all that it was in the power of the hunchback to impart of the history and fate of her beloved sister. In fulfilment of his promise Matthew related to her some portions of the conversation concerning Clarice which took place years ago between Ranf and himself; in mercy to her he omitted what it would most grieve her to hear, and all that she knew was that Clarice was living when they supposed her to be dead. Bitterly did she reproach herself for what, in her agony, she declared was an act of desertion on her part. It was her duty to stop in the old land, and never to give up her search for her dear Clarice until she had found her or had been

furnished with undoubted proof of her unhappy end. Matthew in vain attempted to console her, and was glad that he had concealed from her the knowledge of her dear sister's shame. But Margaret, in the midst of her self-torturing, detected, with her shrewd woman's wit, that something was being hidden from her, and she sent Bertha to Ranf, with an imploring appeal that he would see her, and tell her all he knew of Clarice. She received this message back :

“Not yet. I must choose my time. It will soon come, and then we will speak together. Be silent and patient, and trust in me.”

It was possible to be silent, but not to be patient ; and Margaret was now passing through the most unhappy days of her life. She felt that strange events were impending, and that Ranf, her friend and the friend of Evangeline, held the threads in his hands ; she could trust him, it is true, but what could he know of the love, the torture, that filled her heart ? She wanted to tell him her story ; then he would pity

her, and conceal nothing from her. It was an exquisite misery to her to know that she was powerless, that she could do nothing but wait. Night after night she dreamt of Clarice, and in her dreams Harold, the handsome stranger who now lived with Mauvain, almost invariably found a place. If no one else could satisfy her, why should she not go to him and ascertain whether the strange idea which passed through her mind when she and he met lately in the narrow lane had any foundation in fact, or whether the likeness she saw in his face to the face of one who was connected with the saddest episode in her life was merely accidental? Engrossed in the cares and duties of her new home, she and hers had been so occupied that she had no opportunity of meeting him again; neither had she seen his friend Mauvain, in whose house she had lived since her arrival on the Silver Isle. She brooded upon her misery until it was almost too great for her to bear.

In the meantime Mauvain and Harold were settled in the isle. They, also, had

been so much engaged that they had no time to go about ; there was so much to do in the house and grounds, so much to alter, to suit Mauvain's fastidious tastes, that they had had no time to "cultivate the islanders," as they expressed it. Mauvain had brought with him a great number of cases containing such heirlooms, pictures, and other belongings as he had been able to save from the wreck of his fortune ; the difficulty of arranging and placing these about the house and grounds had been increased by the circumstance that when he asked for the assistance of labourers on the isle he was informed that the islanders could not spare time for any but their own affairs. He had but three servants with him, and it took a month to do what might have been done in a week. Harold and he resolved not to show themselves to the islanders until the house was in order.

The weeks had not passed without adventure or discovery. Harold one night was awakened by a tapping at his window ; he rose and opened the window, and a

white pigeon flew into the room. It was perfectly tame, and allowed him to handle it.

“A carrier dove,” said Harold; “fit messenger for Cupid. Is it by these means that my twisted friend carries on his love affairs?”

An idea seized him; he wrote a message, and tying it under the wing of the pigeon, released it. He stood at the window, watching its flight.

“To the mountain of snow,” he said, as he followed with his eyes the direction of the bird. “Ranf will get my message if he be there.”

The words he wrote were these:

“Harold to Ranf: In what spirit shall we meet—if we meet again? In the spirit of friendship or enmity?”

The following night the winged messenger returned with the message:

“Ranf to Harold: We shall meet again. I am your enemy till death.”

Harold laughed in the solitude of his chamber.

“Ranf is a bold man. Certainly he cannot be accused of lack of courage. He

reckons, perhaps, on the sympathies of the islanders, which assuredly are not with us. They lack courtesy, I am afraid, these simple folk. I noticed how, when Ranf's trial came to an end, they allowed me to depart without offering me food or drink; and I was thirsting for wine. Hitherto, Harold, your chief enemy has been yourself. You have other enemies now. Well, it will give a zest to life. Pretty bird," he said to the dove, which he held in his hand, "there is blood upon your wing. Have I been too rough with you? It has never yet been my way with beauty or innocence." His eyes lighted here on the group of Ranf and Evangeline he had sculptured for Mauvain, and which Mauvain, despite his request, had set up in the grounds. "A fine piece of work, Harold. Tolerably faithful as regards the hunchback, though one would infer, from its contemplation, that Ranf had no soul. That is not true; the hunchback is something more than flesh and blood; I will do him that justice. Mauvain, I owe you what I may never be able to repay for this insult—aye, and for

others which my too careless spirit allowed to pass by unheeded. We are equal, you and I, for we are gentlemen, with our own code of honour. Strange that I have not yet met Evangeline ! To-morrow I shall go in search of my fairy ; to-night I will dream of her. Good-night, Ranf's messenger of hate." He released his fluttering prisoner, and it gladly winged its way through the sweet air to the mountain huts. "I have heard," said Harold as he prepared to retire to rest, "that none but Ranf has had the courage to tread those heights. I know one who will dare them. The mountain is free."

The next morning, over breakfast, Harold and Mauvain spoke of their plans. "It will be an act of courtesy," said Mauvain, "now that the house is in order, to let the islanders know that we shall be willing to exchange civilities with them. We are tolerably good society for each other, but we should die of weariness if left to ourselves."

"We are of one mind upon that," replied Harold. "Doubtless the islanders

will rejoice at the opportunity of paying court to one so high in station as yourself. Does it not strike you, however, as singular that up to this day we have not been troubled with visitors ? ”

“ They would scarcely come uninvited, Harold.”

“ Being possessed of really delicate instincts. You may be right. It is not I who am in question. It is to you, Mauvain, that certain things are due. Your rank, your station, your character, are entitled to consideration. Yet these islanders may require to be taught.”

“ We will teach them, Harold,” said Mauvain, with a smile : “ it is only necessary that we should be seen.”

“ Let us be seen, then, by all means. The sun is out ; shall we walk ? ”

But, although they showed themselves in their best attire and with the polish of their fine manners upon them, Mauvain did not receive the attention he believed to be his due. Those of the islanders with whom they came in contact evinced no disposition to form acquaintance with

them. They looked once upon the gentlemen, and did not seem to care to look again. To the questions graciously put to them by Mauvain and Harold, answers were received in monosyllables; the spirit in which they were met was the spirit of avoidance. The young were attracted to them; but it invariably happened that men or women of maturer age stepped between them and the children, or between them and the young women with whom they would have conversed. This uniform coldness of reception acted in an opposite way upon the two friends; Harold was amused at it; Mauvain was irritated.

“ You regard it too seriously, Mauvain.” said Harold, as they walked homewards; “ the people require education. It is not to be endured that they should show themselves blind to our merits. For myself I care not. Nature is a companion in whom I am ever able to take delight; she is sufficient for me. But it is different with you. The society of fair women is a necessity of your being; you have never

been able to live without them. I trust the stern morality of the islanders will not stand in the way of your pleasures."

"Harold!"

"Yes, Mauvain?"

"I am tolerably familiar with your light manner. Do not push it too far."

Harold gazed at his friend in astonishment. "Do you believe me insincere, then? Since when have you found me backward in friendship? Take heart, Mauvain. We shall not lack adventure in this isle. Trust me for that. What is not willingly given must be taken by force. Is not that idea sufficient to stir your blood? It stirs mine. I, for one, do not intend to die of stagnation. See—who comes this way? One of the fair maids of the isle—and alone! Fortune has not deserted us!"

What more he would have said remained unspoken; his words were frozen on his tongue. The girl who now stood before them was the living presentment of one whom he had loved in secret in the years that were gone, to whom in the bygone time

his tenderest thoughts had been given, and for whose sake he would have sacrificed all that was dearest to him in life. And this maiden resembled her in a manner so startling that for a few moments he was deprived of the power of speech. But it soon returned to him, and he laughed in scorn of himself.

“It is incredible,” he said aloud, “that such a materialist as I should believe in apparitions. Do not be alarmed, fair maid; we are mortals like yourself. But in truth you remind me of a friend; and we are strangers on the isle.”

“I have heard of you,” said the girl, with a frankness common to all the younger residents in the Silver Isle; “you live in our house.”

“The voice is not hers,” said Harold gaily, “and the spell is broken. We live in your old house. Then your name is—?”

“Gabrielle.”

“You have another.”

“Sylvester.”

“And your mother’s name is Margaret.”

“Yes.”

"Pardon my abruptness," said Harold gently, moving aside so that she might pass.

"There is nothing to pardon," said Gabrielle, walking past them.

"Still another question, if you will not think me rude. Were you born upon this isle?"

"Yes," replied Gabrielle, in surprise.

"That is well. The dream has vanished. I hope we shall meet again."

He bowed with the grace that was natural to him, and presently Gabrielle was no longer in sight. Then Harold glanced at Mauvain.

"My questions were pertinent, Mauvain? Confess, now, that they were not entirely out of place!"

Mauvain took a jewelled snuff-box from his pocket, and offered it, with a smile, to Harold. Harold accepted the courtesy, but said inly,—

"Has Mauvain a heart, or what is called a heart?"

"You are thinking of something, Harold, in which I am interested," said Mauvain.

"I confess it, Mauvain. I was asking myself in what you believed."

"And unable to answer yourself? That betrays a lack of perception. I gave you credit for knowing me better. Shall I supply the answer?"

"Yes."

"Love."

"In its spiritual aspect?"

"I am a mortal, Harold."

"Mauvain, I am beginning to envy you. You are not only brave but rash where your self-love or honour is concerned, and I doubt not would give up your life in support of a conviction. And you value life, I know."

"It is the highest gift, Harold."

"Yet we are told that there is something higher, to which most men cling."

"So do not I. The present is my anchor. I leave theology to the priests."

"Long live to-day!" I shall consider seriously whether it would not be more profitable to myself to turn epicure."

"It would add to your enjoyment of life, Harold."

“Indeed, I believe so—or it would, if one were born to the inheritance. For these things are not always matters of choice. Selfish men suffer least. Those who have no faith have all the world open to them. I would I were a true fatalist: I would pluck the ripest fruit, without thought to whom it belonged. Reproached for taking what is not my own, I should answer, ‘It is fate.’ A convenient creed!”

“Harold, you wander from your theme.”

“And my theme is—?”

Mauvain faced his friend with some disposition of seriousness, which lasted for a moment only. With a gay laugh he offered his snuff-box again.

“Mauvain,” said Harold, harking back, “I asked in what you believed. You supplied me with an answer which I decline to accept. It is impossible that a man should live to your years without thought of the past, without dread of the future. If you had the realization of a wish, what would it be?”

“That I might be young again, and live a hundred years. Speaking in earnest,

Harold, you are growing sombre; it was not always so. There was a time when you accepted pleasure without question."

"Say that I seemed to do so, Mauvain."

"And did not betray the seeming. One must judge from the outside. If you choose to conceal your feelings, you must take the consequences. You smile through all the days, and suddenly you come to your friend and say, 'The smile was on my lips, but not in my heart.' How is your friend to judge you? He may say with fair reason, 'You have deceived me through all the days; you are deceiving me now.' Then at once is introduced into the friendly bond a sentiment which feeds like a worm upon the heart of friendship, and robs it of its pleasant aspect. From that moment it becomes a burden. I do believe," says Mauvain, abruptly breaking off, "that I have allowed myself to be betrayed into a lecture. The effect of bad example, Harold. Reflect upon what I have said, and extract a lesson from it; else you will soon cease to be amusing. As for myself, take me as

I am and for what I am, and be content—and grateful. You have wit enough to read me better than you profess to be able to do; have the wit to understand that I can read you better than you suppose. What there is in my life that affects me closely belongs only to myself. If I have opened a window in it through which you have hitherto not seen, I close it now for ever. So—now we are as we were; it will be your fault if things do not go on smoothly between us. Be yourself, as I have known you; but be careful not to go beyond the line of safety.”

By the time they had arrived at this point in their conversation they had reached home, and the last words were spoken as they stood at a window overlooking the garden.

“A visitor, Mauvain,” said Harold. “Our stroll has borne fruit. A woman, too, so the interview is likely to be pleasant.”

He had already detected who the woman was who was now walking towards the

house ; but Mauvain's sight was not so keen as his.

“ Young, Harold ? ”

“ I am afraid not ; she has a matronly walk. Shall we receive her ? ”

“ Certainly, if she desire it. Play the host for me ; my lecture has wearied me.”

“ You, also, are an actor, Mauvain,” was Harold's thought, as he watched the progress of the woman ; “ but if you think you have deceived me, you are grievously deceived. A fire is smouldering which any chance spark may kindle into a blaze.”

To a servant who announced that a woman desired an audience, he gave instructions to admit her, and Margaret Sylvester entered the room. Her face was as white as death, but she had come in pursuance of a purpose which could no longer be delayed ; the agony of her mind was so great that she could not continue to endure it without an effort to satisfy the doubts which were racking her soul. She looked around the old familiar room with

dim eyes ; the action was mechanical, and meant nothing. She saw the form but not the face of Mauvain, for he had moved into the shadow ; the only face she saw and recognized was that of Harold, with whom the purport of her visit was immediately connected.

He stepped forward as she entered, and with a courteous motion invited her to be seated. She scarcely noticed the courtesy, and for a few moments her agitation deprived her of the power of speech. Meanwhile, Harold waited in patience.

“ Do you know me ? ” she asked, when her strength returned to her.

“ We have met twice,” replied Harold, gently ; “ the first time, you charmed me with your voice ; the second, with your womanly kindness to an unfortunate.”

“ May I speak to you freely ? ”

“ Freely.”

“ You have seen me twice, you say, within this isle. Look well into my face, and tell me if you have any remembrance of it in the past ? ”

Harold, obeying her, looked steadily at her. "It is not for me to say," he replied, with a thoughtful glance at Mauvain, who, having seated himself, appeared to be paying but indolent attention to the dialogue. "The past stretches so far back, and my memory plays me treacherous tricks."

She felt that his answer was not honest; that it lacked sincerity. "Would you wantonly inflict torture upon an innocent woman, or upon any person who never by thought or deed did harm to you?"

"No; it is not in my nature."

"And yet you do not answer me. To what can I appeal? To your chivalry? To your humanity? If you knew my sufferings, you would pity me. I scarcely know how to approach the subject which brings me here to-day, to the house in which my children were born, and in which I have spent so many happy years. I beg you, by your sense of honour, by your sense of right and mercy and justice, to help me if you can. You are a gentle-

man ; I am but a weak and most unhappy woman."

Harold turned suddenly to Mauvain. "Mauvain," he said, "this is the mother of the girl we met this morning. This is Margaret Sylvester."

Margaret looked towards Mauvain, whose face was still averted from her, and who acknowledged the introduction by a nod.

"You saw my daughter Gabrielle?"

"Yes, and spoke with her," said Harold. "It is seldom I have seen a fairer face. You appeal to my chivalry ; I thank you for the compliment ; and to my humanity—not often, I am sorry to say, brought into play. If I speak lightly, find some excuse for me ; it is my manner. Your appeal places me at a disadvantage. A woman's strength is in her weakness, and man is no match for her. Now, you have men in your household—a father, a husband, a son. Had any one of these come in your place, it would have been easy to answer him."

"They do not know of my visit. I am here of my own prompting."

“Is no person acquainted with your presence here to-day?”

“No person.”

“You have friends outside your family who do not regard us with too much favour.”

“I do not understand to whom you refer.”

“To Ranf the hunchback, for one.”

“He is not aware that I have come to you.”

At the mention of Ranf's name, Mauvain exhibited a closer interest.

“May I proceed?” asked Margaret.

“It would be churlish to prevent you.”

“I will speak more plainly. I am not a native of the Silver Isle. My girlhood's days were passed in your own land, where at the saddest crisis of my life I met my husband, then a stranger to me, and his father. I was worse than alone; I was in the power of a man who betrayed me, and who tore from me the being most dear to me. Even now, although I have children whom I love and a husband whose tender regard for me is as great as any woman

could hope for—even now, in this peaceful isle, where want and worldly cares are unknown, where we live honoured and respected, with the prospect of a happy ending to our days—even now, I feel that this being to whom I refer is more closely knit to my heart than those who call me wife and mother. She was my sister, and between us existed a love which made us one. I was older, wiser, stronger than she, and when our father died, it was I who took the place of parent and protector to one whose innocence should have been as a shield against the treacherous arts of villains who live to betray, and who bring shame to those who are weaker than themselves. It was our unhappy lot, through our father's misplaced faith and confidence, to find ourselves at his death in the power of an unscrupulous master who used what little talents we possessed to his own selfish advantage. I could have borne that; I did bear it, looking forward to the day when we should be of age and out of his power. This villain made love to my

sister, and I taught him a lesson which prevented him from ever again insulting her. He was an ignorant, ill-bred man, with no pretensions to the title of gentleman. It happened that fatal fortune took us to a town in which our master hoped to enrich himself; he was a gambler, and there were gaming-houses in the town. We became favourites with the people, and he made money by the exhibition of our talents. We were called upon to perform before a company of gentlemen in a theatre which seems to me even at this distance of time the most beautiful on earth. I have not told you—we were travelling actresses, with no stain upon our name. Our lives were as pure as those of the highest ladies in the land; and in most places we met with respect. Our success was so complete in this beautiful theatre that it led to a most base and shameful betrayal. In the middle of the night my sister and I were awakened to dance and sing before two gentlemen with whom our master was gambling. At first I rebelled, but I was compelled to obey.

Can I ever forget that night? Is it possible that I, loving my sister more dearly than ever woman was loved by man, can lose the remembrance of the smallest incident in that fatal night which tore my darling for ever from my side? The room to which we were conducted was but dimly lighted; our master was there, flushed with wine and excitement, and with him two gentlemen whose features are as familiar to me at the present moment as though my meeting with them occurred but yesterday in the sun's full light."

Margaret paused, and looked straight at Harold with a meaning he could not mistake. Harold met her look without an attempt at avoidance, and said gently, "Go on."

"Only one of the gentlemen was playing with our master; the other came towards us with a candelabra in his hand, and spoke in a tone so courteous that it was almost sufficient, if anything could have satisfied me, to allay my fears. Before he addressed us, this gentleman said a few words which in my after experience

afforded a clue to his profession. I do not remember to what they were an answer. His words were these: 'She can dance in shadow;' he was referring to my sister, who was almost asleep in my arms. 'Let her dance in shadow,' he said; 'it will form a finer picture.' None but an artist would have given expression to the words, and I judged afterwards that this gentleman was probably a painter or a sculptor."

"A shrewd guess," said Harold, observing that she paused in the expectation of hearing him speak. "Your story is more than interesting; it recalls a dream of the past."

Margaret looked at him gratefully. "Is it necessary that I shall proceed?"

"What say you, Mauvain?" asked Harold. "Do you wish to hear what follows?"

"I leave it to you, Harold," replied Mauvain; "I know that I can rely upon your discretion."

"Proceed, then," said Harold to Margaret.

“To put a shameful construction upon what I afterwards heard,” said Margaret, in a lower tone than that she had hitherto used, “would be to cast dishonour upon my sister. The words that passed between our master and the gentleman with whom he was playing bore no meaning to my mind at the time. If I had rightly understood them, no power on earth could have prevented me from guarding and protecting my sister until death stepped in. But I forget ! I forget ! When vile unworthy means are used to accomplish a base purpose, love’s armour is powerless for defence !”

Neither Harold nor Mauvain attempted to break the silence which ensued, and presently Margaret resumed her story :

“We danced and sang for the pleasure of these gentlemen until, wearied and exhausted, my sister sank into my arms. I watched over her, kneeling by her side, and slept with her, unfaithful guardian that I was. When I awoke in the morning I was alone ; my sister was gone, lost to me for ever from that fatal night. In

reply to my anxious inquiries—my sister and I had never before been separated for an hour—my master told me a plausible tale of having sent her on in advance of us in the care of a friend; he swore to me that he spoke the truth, and bade me hasten to get ready to follow her. I asked him whether the gentlemen before whom we had performed were in the hotel—for I had some vague idea of appealing to them for protection; and he informed me that they had taken their departure early in the morning. More than one suspicious circumstance indicated that he was deceiving me, but I hoped against hope, and we travelled forward in the direction taken, as he averred, by my sister. In the night we arrived at an inn where I expected to find her; she was not there, and the following morning we resumed our journey; and when, on the evening of that second day, we reached a village, and I learned that all traces of my dear one were lost, the bitter truth forced itself upon me that we had been basely betrayed. It will not help me now to recall the agony of my position. I

was in a part of the country of which I was completely ignorant; I was without money, and was utterly, utterly helpless. To have left my master would have been voluntarily to deprive myself of even the remotest chance of recovering my sister. My master was cunning; seeing that I suspected him, he offered me my liberty, although, as I was legally bound to him, he could have compelled me to work for him until I was twenty-one years of age. With as much calmness and wisdom as I could bring to my aid I debated how I should act, and I could come to no other conclusion than that my only hope lay in remaining with my master, and keeping a watch over his movements. Months passed, and my hope died away. How wretched was my life, and with what self-torturings was I afflicted! So time passed until I made the acquaintance of Matthew Sylvester and his son. By what means the good man who afterwards became my father obtained my release from the power of a human monster, he has never divulged, but it could have been only by purchase, for

my master would have sold his soul for money. I travelled with them, sharing their life, and after a time Matthew broke the news to me of my darling sister's death; he had learned it from my master, and had mercifully withheld it from me. So, with that earthly tie severed, as I believed, for ever, I married Matthew Sylvester's son, and we came to the Silver Isle."

"And here ends your story," said Harold, who had followed Margaret's narrative with the closest attention.

"No; there is more to tell, which will enable you to understand the reason of my visit, if indeed you are still in ignorance of it. When my second child, Gabrielle, was born, a statue of Evangeline, a name loved and honoured in the isle, was set up in the market-place. It was the work of a young sculptor in the old world, and there was great talk of its beauty. I gazed upon it in wonder and terror, for the face I saw was the face of my sister. The sculptor who modelled those marble features must have known Clarice."

This was the first time Margaret had mentioned the name of her sister, and Harold said :

“Do you hear, Mauvain ? Clarice ?”

“I hear, Harold,” replied Mauvain, calmly ; “the woman had best finish her story.”

“I allowed myself to be argued out of my fancy, but it was never entirely dispelled, and events have lately occurred which have fixed it in my mind as a certain conviction. Not only was I betrayed in being torn from her I loved so dearly, but I was deceived in the story of her death. At the time my master informed Matthew Sylvester that my sister was dead, she lived. Why was the wicked lie spoken ? To what base end—for what base purpose ?”

“Why do you question me ?” asked Harold.

“Because you, perhaps, are the only person within this isle who can relieve my tortured heart. You are the sculptor of the image of Clarice.”

“A surmise,” said Harold.

“A certainty,” retorted Margaret.

“There is no name, it is true, to the image, but the letter H is cut in the marble. Your name is Harold.”

“Consistently argued. What then?”

“What then?” echoed Margaret, advancing towards him with clasped hands and heaving bosom. “Is it not natural that I should come to you to ascertain the fate of my beloved sister? If you are the sculptor—and you have not denied it, being a gentleman, who, to screen himself, would scorn to hide behind a lie—you knew Clarice after I believed her to be dead. You are one of the two before whom we were dragged in the night at the will of our cruel master. When we first met here upon this isle you recognized me, and you saw that I recognized you. Answer me, if you have the feelings of a man? What has become of my sister Clarice?”

“Direct me, Mauvain,” said Harold.
“How am I to reply?”

Mauvain in a careless tone, gave direction.
“In any way you please, in what concerns yourself. If this matter is yours, satisfy the

woman according to your whim. Invent, imagine, speak the truth or lie—in short, say anything that occurs to your ingenious mind; but in so far as I am concerned, I forbid you to violate the confidence of friendship. My own affairs I can settle without interference; and believe me, Harold, I will allow none.”

Rising to leave the room, Mauvain was suddenly confronted by Margaret, who, now that he was standing with the light upon his face, recognized him.

“Great Heaven!” she exclaimed; “you are the gentleman who was playing cards with my master on that fatal night!” She looked from one to the other in dumb amazement; neither Harold nor Mauvain assisted her by sign or word. “Will you not speak?” she cried. “Can you stand calmly by, having the power to say what I would give my best blood to hear, and speak no word? Are you men or monsters?”

Mauvain frowned. “You are bold, mistress.”

“You would find me bolder,” exclaimed

Margaret, with flaming eyes, "if I had reason to suppose that you, or you"—turning defiantly to Harold—"had wronged my sister, an innocent child, with no knowledge or suspicion of the world's cruelty and deceit!"

Mauvain tapped his snuffbox lightly, and with a smile asked, "What would you do?"

"What would I do? I would kill you where you stand! Ah, me! What am I saying? I forget that I am a woman."

"Your forgetfulness extends farther than that, mistress. But in this matter, truly, you would need a champion."

"I should find one," she cried as hot as he was cool. "There is not a man on the Silver Isle who would not champion my cause, for it is the cause of right and virtue. And remember, I have those nearer to me who would hold their lives lightly, if I called upon them to avenge a cruel wrong inflicted upon a pure and helpless girl. For she was betrayed—I know it now—I feel it here!" pressing her hand to her heart. "Oh, God! throw light upon

this mystery, and bring the guilty to justice ! ”

“ Listen to me,” said Mauvain, in his smooth polished voice, which nothing seemed able to disturb, “ and know your station. Had you appealed to me in a manner which showed that you were aware of the difference in our positions, I might have satisfied you—”

“ Having the power ? ” demanded Margaret, every pulse in her body throbbing with passion.

“ Having the power,” replied Mauvain. “ I might, I say, have satisfied you, and told you something of your sister. That it might not have pleased you springs from the fact that you and she are of a different order from those you are now addressing.”

“ I thank Heaven for it, with all my soul ! ” cried Margaret, with a growing horror of this polished gentleman.

“ Had you chosen,” continued Mauvain, “ to speak in tones of humbleness, you would have gone from this house—and I bid you begone quickly, for it is mine—

somewhat wiser than you entered it. During our pleasant interview, mistress, you have asked many questions. Favour me by answering one—the only one—I shall put to you. Lives there upon this isle any person to whom you are indebted for the new light which has so suddenly dawned upon you?”

“Yes,” she replied; “Ranf the hunch-back.”

“I suspected as much. Ask him to be your champion.”

“I will do so.”

“Good. Now, go,” pointing to the door, “unless you wish to be turned from my gates.”

“I will go,” said Margaret, walking to the door; “but a voice within me tells me we shall meet again.”

“I shall look forward to the interview,” said Mauvain, with a graceful bow, “with infinite pleasure.”

Never, in her after life, was Margaret able to remember how she reached the gates, and passed beyond them. She did so, with no consciousness of time or space,

and she saw nothing, heard nothing, until Harold, who had followed her, laid his hand upon her arm.

“Pardon me,” he said, “for my share of the proceedings which have so much distressed you ; but I was free neither to act nor speak as my heart dictated. I have something to say to you which could not be spoken within the house you have just left.”

His manner was so earnest, and his demeanour so different from that in which he had hitherto presented himself to her, that she could not but listen to him. He continued :

“In the story you told us of the career of your sister and yourself you said that your lives were pure and stainless. To cast a doubt upon that statement would be, I am certain—on my truth and honour, not as a gentleman, but as a man, I aver it—as false as it would be shameful. I believe it implicitly, unhesitatingly, but for a reason of my own, in which you and your pitiful story play their part, I want to hear it once more from your own lips.”

“Shall I utter it again to one who has proved himself my enemy?” she asked.

“I am not your enemy,” he declared, with moist eyes and quivering lips; “I swear that I am and would be your friend?”

“It is monstrous,” she cried, “that one who assisted to betray my unhappy sister should thus address me!”

“Ah, how you wrong me! and with what apparent cause!—for truth and justice and evidence are on your side, and I stand alone without a witness. You must trust me—you must! Careless, reckless, regardless as I may seem of all that is highest and noblest in this life and the next—for I believe in it, Margaret Sylvester—there is in me a worthier spirit than I have ever shown to the world, than I have ever admitted even to myself in my hours of self-communion. In saying this I do not desire to avoid responsibility. As I have sown, so must I reap—and I have sown deliberately, tares, weeds, and plants which have been as a poison to my soul.

Let it pass ; what is done, is done, and my life shall answer for it—my life which I account of less value than the frailest blade of grass. But in this matter which you have revealed to-day there is something which is infinitely dearer to me than life, if life were as precious to me as it is to most. I knew your sister ; I honoured, pitied, and respected her. May hope and mercy be blotted out for me through all eternity if by word or deed I ever did her wrong ! Do you believe me ? ”

“ I do,” said Margaret, carried away by his fervour and earnestness ; “ you compel me to believe you.”

“ By-and-by you may believe without compelling, and, of your own honest, unbiassed will, may think of me with tenderness and pity. Voices whisper to me, as they have done to you. Fate and destiny are working to their allotted end, and the hand of man cannot arrest them. Now let me hear once more from your lips that the lives of your sister and your own, at the time I met you in the old land, were pure and stainless.”

“ Have you a sister ? ”

“ No.”

“ A mother ? ”

“ No ; she died when I was a child. She is to me but a memory.”

“ A pure memory ? ”

“ She has been to me the emblem of purity—its spirit, its incarnation. In my earlier days I used to look up to heaven believing that she shone upon me in the light of a star. The brightest, the sweetest and most peaceful, speaking to me, with silent voice, of sacred hopes and aims which have long since died out of my life. You have revived that holy memory. To-night I shall see my mother’s star in the heavens ; and upon my knees, for the first time for God knows how many years, I shall breathe a prayer.”

“ Pure as the memory of your sainted mother,” said Margaret, solemnly, “ was my beloved sister Clarice when you first saw her in the old land.” Involuntarily she held out her hand to him, and he took it and raised it to his lips. She was about

imploringly to ask him now to divulge what he knew concerning Clarice, when, divining her attention, he begged her to say no more at present.

“Soon you shall know all,” he said; “I go to take the seal from my lips.”

And with these strange words he left her, and returned to Mauvain’s house.

CHAPTER VII.

HAROLD DEMANDS AN EXPLANATION OF

MAUVAIN.

ON his way, Harold paused two or three times to wipe his lips, which were dry, and his forehead, which was moist, and to contemplate the evidences of Mauvain's exquisite taste and culture. He paused, also, at the group which he had cut in marble of Ranf and Evangeline.

"It is a disgrace to an artist," he mused, "but it is not my property, and must stand as a record of my shame. Thus does an artist sell his soul, piece-meal, for wine and fine linen. But there is a better record in the market-place, which may compensate for this libel. I feel almost weak-minded enough to go and set my name upon it; not this hour, though; I have other work to do."

He walked straight to the room in which he had left Mauvain. His friend was not there; he went then to a smaller room which Mauvain had made into a study. He tried the door; it was locked. He knocked, and Mauvain answered.

“Who is there?”

“It is I—Harold.”

“I am resting,” said Mauvain, from within, “and cannot be disturbed.”

“I must see you at once.”

“Must!” echoed Mauvain haughtily.

“It is imperative.”

The door was unlocked, and Harold entered. The room was in disorder, and bore no signs of the rest which Mauvain said he was taking; every secret drawer in a large and handsome desk was open, and the table and desk were strewn with papers. “You have been busy, I see,” said Harold.

“I told you,” rejoined Mauvain, with a lack of cordiality, “that I was at rest. I did not wish to be disturbed.”

“And I told you it was imperative I

should see you. I regret the necessity, but it is not the less a necessity, because you are reluctant to be disturbed."

In this brief dialogue the ordinary tone observed by these friends in their conversations had been lost sight of; this appeared to strike them simultaneously, and they at once relapsed into their usual manner. Mauvain pointed to a chair, covered with papers, and Harold, without apology, scattered the papers to the floor, and took the seat.

"You must have something of the greatest interest to communicate," said Mauvain, with a purposed drawl, "that you intrude upon me against my wish."

"You are partly right, Mauvain; I have something of the greatest interest, not exactly to communicate, but to speak to you upon."

"I observed that you followed that woman out of the house."

"Yes, I followed her."

"And conversed with her?"

"Yes."

“Do you wish to relate to me what passed between you?”

“No, I have no such wish; but in what we have now to say, you may perhaps gather something of its import.”

“You are in a strange humour, Harold.”

“Mauvain, I have seen a ghost.”

“Of a woman?”

“Of a star.”

“Come, this promises well.”

“I almost hope it will not end as well, for if it does my hopes may disappear and my faith may be once more lost, never again to be restored.”

“Interesting as ever, Harold; I scarcely regret you disturbed me.”

“Mauvain, I must speak to you seriously.”

“I hate seriousness, but if you insist upon it, I will not thwart you.”

“Let us, then, travel back in memory to the eventful night so vividly recalled awhile since by Margaret Sylvester.”

“I have had occasion, Harold, to warn you lately more than once; I trust you

are not going to compel me to do so again."

"It is immaterial, Mauvain; no warnings, exhortations, threats, or appeals, can divert me from the goal upon which my mind is set. Spare, then, your breath, and let us converse freely, and, if we can, honestly."

"Have you come to pick a quarrel?"

"Heaven forbid; but if that contingency were to occur, we at least should know how to settle it. We stand on equal ground; we are both gentlemen. Mauvain, I have been your friend. Your companion in many a daring and many a foolish adventure, I have never yet had occasion to question your courage or your honour. Not always in harmony with you, stung sometimes by the airs of superiority you have assumed—and in which to some extent you were fairly justified—I have followed your lead in idle mood, and have upheld you before your face and behind your back, as was the duty of a friend who, although he could not justly defend, on the strict score of morality, all that

was done, still was content to share the pleasure and the consequences of acts in which he was a participant."

"It suited you, Harold."

"I do not deny it; nor do I assume a virtue which I am conscious I have never possessed. But I have always understood—and on my honour I speak the truth—that those who were led by us to share our pleasures, or who of their own accord joined in them, were like ourselves votaries of pleasure. I use the word in its ordinary acceptation. That some required to be wooed, coaxed, intrigued for—that some held off and by so doing added to the pursuit a keener enjoyment—that some falsely professed, and needed argument, persuasion, protestation, before they joined the hunt—led always to the same result. Judged by a moral standard—I ask a thousand pardons for dragging in such a figure of speech—we and they were invariably on an equality; of the earth earthy, with but one object in view—enjoyment of life."

"You have missed your vocation,

Harold ; you should have been a new-school preacher."

"I have missed much of which I shall never now obtain possession. What I have said has been not in justification but in explanation of myself. Mauvain, in all that I have joined, in all that I have participated, I have never once had reason to suppose that innocence was betrayed."

"Poor innocence ! and simple, unsophisticated Harold ! I see the dimmest glimmer of a light."

"It will grow clearer with every word that follows. I come, then, once more, to the night so vividly recalled by Margaret Sylvester. I need not detail again the events of that night."

"For love's sake, no ! It is as clear to me as it seems to be to you ; although why it should have so much affected you passes my comprehension. But I shall be soon enlightened."

"I had arrived, without premeditation, in a town in which you were making a brief stay ; I could stop but a few hours.

There was but one hotel for gentlemen in the town, and there I put up. I was young at the time—”

“Very nearly as young, my dear Harold, as you are at the present time.”

“I would it were so. We had met before, and had formed an agreeable acquaintanceship, almost, if not quite, a friendship. You professed to be delighted to see me. ‘Harold,’ said you, ‘I can give you a night of pleasure and delight. There is here a travelling manager, with two of the loveliest creatures you have ever beheld. I have engaged them to sing and dance in a theatre attached to this hotel, and only my private friends are to be admitted to witness the performance. The manager is a scoundrel, and the girls—well, what such girls usually are. Dine with me, and be my guest for the night.’ I gladly consented—I was proud of your friendship, Mauvain, for your name stood high, as it has always stood, and to be accepted by you was a mark of distinction. Believe me it was not on those worldly grounds that you won me; I had no sordid

object in view ; but it was because I fancied I discerned in you a nature akin to my own."

Harold's voice faltered as he recalled these youthful dreams, and his head drooped, and Mauvain, as he regarded the man who was young enough to be his son, was stirred by an unusual tenderness. He placed his hand upon Harold's hand, and for a moment Harold allowed it to rest there. Then he drew it softly away, and raising his head, gazed at Mauvain sadly, with tears in his eyes. Mauvain, scarcely knowing what he did, held out his arms, as though he would embrace his friend ; but Harold held back, and Mauvain's arms fell to his side. In a constrained voice he said,—

"Your memory is perfect ; proceed."

"The entertainment you furnished," continued Harold, "was princely. No wonder your friends were always ready to stand by you ; you gave them ever of your best, and there was no stint to your generosity. After dinner we adjourned to the theatre, some score or so of gentlemen,

flushed with wine and eager for pleasure ; but you, Mauvain, were cool and collected. I have noticed that wine does not intoxicate you, and that in the midst of the greatest excitement you never commit an indiscretion of speech. This is one of the qualities which have enabled you to retain your supremacy over those of weaker minds with whom you associated. You spoke of the girls whose performances we were about to witness, certainly with enthusiasm, but at the same time with moderation and self-possession. You implied that you were in a sense their master. It was as if you said : ‘ I will show you something of rare excellence, but understand that it is mine.’ There was no question on our part as to your right, and when the sisters appeared, and danced and sang, we envied you the possession of a prize so exquisite. At the conclusion of the performance some among us were wild for an introduction to your fair ones, and I remember your saying, gravely and with decision, ‘ Gentlemen, the play is over ; Good-night.’ They took the hint and

departed ; and I was also about to depart, when you begged me to remain. ‘On one condition,’ I said ; ‘that you afford me another glimpse of these strangely beautiful girls.’ ‘You shall be gratified,’ you replied, and asked me, with the air of a conqueror, if I was smitten. Now, Mauvain, let me make the confession to you that I was deeply agitated by what had occurred. The girls were so different from any I had seen—there was so genuine an air of innocence and simplicity about them—they were so beautiful, so young, and so apparently guileless, that it was with difficulty I could bring myself to believe they were not pure-minded. You convinced me to the contrary ; you spoke of them lightly and flippantly, and introduced into your remarks so much of world-wisdom that I accepted these fair creatures with the brand you placed upon them, and strove to think they were what you said they were. It pained me to the heart to do so, and frequently my better self whispered to me, ‘It is impossible ; believe him not.’ I was compelled to depart early in the

morning, and I had a task to perform before I left with respect to a commission for a piece of sculpture. I was at that time an enthusiast in my art; I left you to execute my task, saying I would join you in an hour. It was past midnight when I returned, and then, to my surprise, I found you in the company of the scoundrel manager; you and he were gambling for high stakes, higher, I saw in an instant, than such a man as he could afford to play for. However, it was no business of mine, and, having conceived an intolerable aversion to the fellow, I sat down, and watched with pleasure the tortures you were inflicting upon him by winning from him sums of money which it was impossible he would ever be able to pay. No one could excel you in this kind of work; your coolness, your finesse, your imperturbable good-temper, were terrible weapons against a man of low breeding and indifferent education, who trembled with eager greed at every shuffle of the cards, and railed at fortune in the coarsest and vulgarest terms. I whispered to you once, ‘What

is your object, Mauvain ?' 'To ruin this scoundrel irretrievably,' you replied ; 'to punish him for impertinence towards my goddess, and release her for ever from his guardianship.' It was reasonable enough, I thought, and I wished you success in your endeavour. Success was yours, for fortune was on your side, and every ticking of the clock added to the entanglement of the scoundrel. It is unnecessary, Mauvain, unless you wish it, for me to continue my description of what passed during that night ; it has already been related by Margaret Sylvester in tones which are ringing now in my ears."

"Consider, then," said Mauvain, "that the story of the night—I am beginning to weary of it, Harold—is finished, and come at once to what it is evident you desire to say. Upon that point I am curious."

"The gambling duel is over," said Harold, "and the scoundrel is ruined. In the intervals of the shuffling and cutting of the cards certain words passed between you and your antagonist which were evidently not intended for my ears, and of

which the purport was not plain ; but I asked for no explanation, not feeling myself justified. You and I are standing in the clear morning's light outside the hotel ; my horse is saddled, and I am ready to depart. The past vanishes, Mauvain. I see you, with no signs of fatigue upon your face ; you are calm and collected, and, your hand in mine, are wishing me good-bye. There is something very sweet and pure in the air ; the town lies hushed in sleep ; the windows of the hotel we have just quitted are beaming with rosy colour. It comes upon me to speak once more of the girls we left sleeping side by side. I say to you, ' But for your assurance, Mauvain, I should never have believed that an impure thought could reside in the hearts of either of these sisters, especially of the younger.' ' Were you ten years older, Harold,' you reply, ' you would not find it difficult to believe. Let me undeceive you ; the girls are not sisters. They call themselves so for their own purposes. It is probable, Harold, that we shall not

meet again for months. Take this piece of wisdom with you in your travels: never believe in a woman's looks or a woman's words; the fairer the face the falser the woman.' And having refreshed and strengthened me with this cup of poison, you bade me farewell. It was two years before we met again, and from the time of that reunion we have seldom parted but for a few days or weeks. In those two years I travelled and saw much, and I can honestly say that I never lost the memory of the girl-woman whose face had enthralled me on the night of our last meeting; and when, returning, I met Clarice once more, and in your company, I said, 'Mauvain is right; the fairer the face, the falser the woman.' From that day I lived two lives—an outward life of pleasure and excitement and unmeaning protestation; an inner life of dreams and fancies and pure imaginings. In the actual life there was no sweetness or freshness—and it was real; in the dream-life there were truth, and purity, and innocence—and it was a delusion. You

had most bitterly proved it to me. And thus until this day it has remained."

Harold paused, and all the tenderness departed from his voice. Rising, he confronted Mauvain, and with a stern look, said, "I have respected your confidence, in the belief that no deceit was practised upon me, and that I had not unwittingly been made a party to a dishonourable action. This touches me more nearly perhaps than you imagine. You are a brave man and a gentleman; you will not deny me my right. I demand an explanation of you."

"Do you threaten, Harold?"

"No; I simply insist upon my right."

"Harold," said Mauvain, with deliberation, "let this matter rest; it will be better for both of us. We have been friends; let us continue so."

"It is not possible," said Harold, "that I should ever touch your hand again in friendship unless you satisfy me that you have not used me unworthily."

"You will not be advised?"

"I take my own course, as you have

taken yours. God knows where it will lead me, but I am resolved."

"You link yourself with that woman—Margaret Sylvester; you stand with her against me?"

"Why," exclaimed Harold, in so scornful a tone that the blood rushed into Mauvain's face, but almost in the same moment he forced a smile to his lips, "it would almost appear that you are appealing to me for championship! Then the Mauvain of to-day is not the Mauvain I have hitherto known."

"Have your way," said Mauvain, with a light laugh. "What is it you require?"

"The truth."

"You shall have it, Mr. Dreamer, naked and unvarnished."

"I expect no less. You are not made of the metal that is daunted by consequences. On the night upon which our fate seems to hang, you told me that Margaret and Clarice were not sisters. Did you believe this?"

"Upon my honour, Harold, it is a

problem. I believe in so little! All is fair in love and war."

"We were not at war; we were friends, and I would have defended you to the death."

"All is fair, then, in love, without the war; and right or wrong, I fancied you had an eye for the fair one who had captivated me."

"For Clarice?"

"Yes."

"You were not mistaken. I loved her!"

"Harold!"

"With all my heart and soul, I loved her! Had I believed her pure, no power on earth could have prevented me from asking her to be my wife. Do you admit now that I have a right to an explanation?"

"Yes; but I did not suspect—having no reason to do so—that your heart was so deeply engaged."

"You judged from yourself?"

"Yes."

"And if you had learned otherwise,

Mauvain, would you have been diverted from your purpose ? ”

“ I think not, Harold ; I was never given to self-sacrifice.”

“ Answered honestly. And now you can tell me ; did you believe these poor girls to be sisters ? ”

“ In truth, Harold, I did not consider too curiously. Their master was such an incorrigible scoundrel that it was impossible to trust him or place faith in his words. He said they were sisters.”

“ Then you spoke falsely when, without question on my part, you told me that they were not ? ”

“ You will have to answer to me, Harold, for the insult.”

“ I shall be ready ; we shall neither of us flinch from what is to follow. I repeat that you spoke falsely to me when you told me Margaret and Clarice were not sisters.”

“ I invented a fiction to save you pain. It was the easiest way, I thought, to prevent you from taking the affair too seriously to heart.”

“A proof that you yourself admitted there was a difference between these girls and those with whom you classed them. Their scoundrel-master, Mauvain—did he tempt you by the lie that they were of an easy, complying nature, and ready to fall into your princely arms?”

“No; he extolled them for their virtue and their modesty.”

Harold caught his breath, and recoiled a step from Mauvain, exclaiming, “How completely Margaret Sylvester was justified in asking us whether we were men or monsters!”

“You wished for the truth, Harold, and I am giving it you.”

“And having learnt this from the lips of the man who knew them best, you deliberately laid a plan for their betrayal!”

“Spare me your heroics, Harold, and make an end as quickly as possible.”

“It is clear to me now. You won of the scoundrel a sum of money which it was impossible he could pay, and you bargained with him for Clarice. He, knowing your power and influence, knowing that you

could hunt him from place to place, and utterly ruin him, sold you a pure and helpless girl, and left her to your mercy.”

“There is a slight flaw in your indictment. The bargain was of his suggesting, not of mine.”

“But you consented to it?”

“Yes, I consented to it, knowing from experience how easily women are consoled. Are you satisfied?”

“Perfectly. I now understand the meaning of that expression of sadness which never for a moment left Clarice’s face; I now know why I found her so often in tears, and why, when by chance our conversation touched upon purity and innocence in woman, she turned from me in grief and distress. Poor child! how she suffered! and how deep must have been her shame and sense of degradation that she should have kept her heart closed to the offer of sympathy and help from one in whom she sometimes said she could have believed, had not her faith and her hope and her trust been irretrievably shattered! Mauvain, from this moment I renounce your friend-

ship—you are no longer my friend! Had I known earlier what I know now, I should have proclaimed war against you with all the strength and earnestness of my soul. The knowledge comes too late to me that your heartless cynicism and cold disbelief in aught that is pure in woman's breast have robbed me of my dearest hope. I look back upon myself with contempt for having been so misled and deceived. Not yours all the blame; I should have had the strength to resist. You have been like an evil spirit walking by my side, pointing out corruption, poisoning what was sweetest and fairest to the eye. But even now I should be thankful, for in casting you from me I regain something of my boyish trust." He looked towards the window with a sad, strange smile. "The air is fresher, Mauvain—the sky brighter; I shall have a better understanding of Nature's voice and signs. Before I go, grant me one favour; I have asked it before, and you have refused. My sculptured group of Ranf and Evangeline stands yonder; destroy it!"

“It is yours, Harold ; I give it to you freely. Do what you will with it.”

For a moment Harold swayed towards Mauvain ; with a quick and angry motion he pulled himself back as it were, and saying, “Farewell !” left the room.

Mauvain, without stirring, listened to the retreating footsteps of the man who had been his friend, and for whom he entertained more of love than for any living human creature ; and then he sank into a chair, resting his head upon his hand. He was roused by the sound of heavy crashing blows without, and going to the window he saw, scattered about the garden, the marble group of Ranf and Evangeline shattered to pieces.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE LOVERS.

HAROLD cast no backward glance to Mauvain's house; he walked straight from it to the woods. Some time during the night he would redeem his promise to Margaret Sylvester, and tell her all he knew of the story of Clarice; in the meantime he felt the necessity of solitude and self-communing.

“In a new world, and without a friend,” he thought, “I am commencing a new life. Farewell to dreams; I must work, as other men do in the Silver Isle. Who will accept the labour of my hands, in return for food and shelter? To pass my days in indolence, and beg for food, would be an added shame to the many that lie heavy on my manhood. Who takes me as a servant will have a sorry bargain. On

my word I have half a mind to go and offer myself to the hunchback. There is humour in the idea. Unless I am mistaken in him, he would not turn me from his hut. If nothing better offers, I will visit him in his mountain home, after I have fulfilled my promise to Margaret. Mauvain, a sword is hanging over your head which, if you are vulnerable, will make your soul bleed."

He sat upon the trunk of a tree whose branches, bending over him, formed a canopy through which he saw the clouds sailing peacefully on. He lay and watched them with tender, regretful spirit.

"How sweet is the gathering twilight! Resting here within this peaceful solitude, I can realize how false has been the glare and glitter of my days. Better far to have been a woodman, with wife and children, stirred by no other ambition than that which is compassed by love and labour. Let me dream of what might have been."

And so he lay and dreamed, and the past took new shape and form. The woman he loved was his; he had rescued her from the peril which threatened her,

and they lived a happy, impossible life, in which all the best and purest of his young ambitions and hopes were realized. What brought Evangeline into his dreams! She was there, and took her share in the unreal happiness upon which he fed, in defiance of the stern reality which moved around his dreams.

He was aroused by a murmur of voices, which at first seemed part of his fancies. The illusion passed, he opened his eyes.

Within a few yards of him stood two beings, a man and a girl. He recognized the girl instantly. Evangeline, most beautiful and fair, lithe and graceful, gazing with eyes of love upon her companion, a manly young fellow in the garb of a fisherman. They stood hand in hand, and as they moved away the young man passed his arm around her, and bent his face to hers.

"Theirs is the springtime," mused Harold; "I must learn the truth."

Rising, he walked after them; hearing his steps, they turned and faced him.

"Once more we meet," said Harold,

with a courteous salutation to Evangeline.

“Do you not recognize me?”

Evangeline did not reply. The vague remembrance she had of him needed stirring into life.

“I perhaps know you,” said the young man, “although we have never met. Are you Mauvain?”

“My name is Harold.” He looked once more in a questioning way at Evangeline. “Do you not remember? I brought you to the Silver Isle, and my last words to you were, ‘Princess of the Silver Isle, I kiss your fairy fingers.’”

“I remember you, but not clearly. You came first to the isle with Ranf and me.”

“It is so. You look upon me with avoidance. Why?”

“I have heard something of what passed between you and my mother.”

“Not all?”

“Joseph,” said Evangeline, averting her face from Harold; “let us go.”

“Come, then.” And Joseph held her more closely to his side.

“A moment, pray,” said Harold softly;

“you have nothing to fear from me. I must see her whom you call mother, for her sake and yours.”

“For mine !”

“Yes, fair maid, for yours. Will you conduct me to her? I do not know her house.”

“You can follow us,” said Joseph; “we are on our way home.”

“I thank you. You bear a likeness to Margaret Sylvester.”

“I am her son.”

Harold gazed from Evangeline to Joseph, and from Joseph to Evangeline, with so much meaning in his eyes that the girl blushed; but in his manner there was no offence; it was at once tender and solicitous.

“May your lives be happy and peaceful ! I will follow you to Margaret Sylvester’s house.”

They wended their way in silence; even between Evangeline and Joseph there passed no word; the presence of the stranger seemed to cast a cloud over their young hearts.

Margaret Sylvester, seeing Harold approach the house, ran out to meet him.

“You have come!” she cried.

“I have come,” he replied, “and the seal is off my lips.”

“Enter, then,” she said, with a beating heart, and led the way into the house.

CHAPTER IX.

HAROLD FINDS HIMSELF AN OUTCAST ON THE
SILVER ISLE.

THE story was told. Without reservation, but with a delicacy which could not be surpassed, Harold related all that he knew of Clarice from the time of her betrayal. Frequently was he stopped in his recital by Margaret's tears and anguish, and his heart was racked by the sight of her suffering. He knew he could do nothing to lessen it, and he did not attempt by a word to exculpate Mauvain or himself from the wrong which lay at their door; but, even in the midst of her own grief, Margaret recognized that the man who stood before her with downcast head and eyes suffused with tears was more sinned against than sinning. Nothing yet had been said concerning Evangeline; her

name had not been uttered during the interview. Harold seemed to be waiting for a cue from Margaret, and she did not give it; her mind was occupied only with the image of her beloved Clarice.

“There is still something more,” she said; “does my sister live?”

“I cannot tell you,” replied Harold, seeing an opportunity of introducing Evangeline’s name. “A year after the departure of Ranf and Evangeline for the Silver Isle—”

He purposely paused, and made no effort to complete the sentence, and Margaret, detecting a hidden meaning in his tone, gazed at him with a new and suddenly-awakened interest.

“Yes, yes—go on.”

“A year after their departure your sister suddenly disappeared.”

“You made an endeavour to find her! You did not leave her to a worse fate than had already befallen her!”

“I made every endeavour to discover her; for months I continued my inquiries

—without success. I could learn nothing of her; and I believe I am correct in affirming that from that day Mauvain has never beheld her.”

“Then she is dead!” cried Margaret. “No hope remains! Not in this world shall I be able to obtain her forgiveness for my cruel desertion of her.”

Harold was silent; he had no consolation to offer. He waited till this paroxysm of grief had passed away, and then he said,—

“You saw Evangeline when she first arrived upon this isle, a child.”

“Yes; and my heart was drawn to her. I begged that she might be allowed to enter my home as one of my family, and the islanders consented to my so receiving her.”

“A natural prompting; you know that Ranf is not her father.”

“Ranf himself informed me that she was doubly orphaned.”

“Had you no suspicion—it is but conjecture on my part; but it is in my mind as an impression impossible to efface—

that she might be as near to you in blood as she is in affection ? ”

“Great Heaven!” cried Margaret, understanding what he wished to convey. “You confirm my own suspicions ! Ah, if it be true, then is Evangeline doubly dear to me ! But the proof—the proof ! ”

“The proof is in her face ; by a hundred signs not easy to describe, am I convinced of it—as I was when I first saw her, a child, in the old land. I am unable to assist you further ; but there is one who may help you—the hunchback, who, in some strange way, appears to hold the threads of this mystery in his hands.”

“I thank you—I thank you. Ranf is our true friend ; I honour and love him. He bade me be patient and silent, and to trust in him. I have been neither patient nor silent. How was it possible, suffering as I have been suffering ? At what are you looking ?

She moved to Harold’s side by the window, through which he was looking into the garden. By the soft light of the moon they saw Evangeline and Joseph

Sylvester walking slowly to a wooden shed, on the roof of which some dove-cotes were built. The young man's arm was round the girl's waist, and she leant towards him tenderly, confidingly, her head almost touching his breast. A sweet and wistful smile hovered about Margaret's lips.

"It is a joyful sign. They love each other, and I shall have my sister's child always with me. Heaven be thanked!" Already had she accepted it as a fact; Evangeline was hers, of her blood, and would soon be bound to her by even closer ties of love and kinship. "How wonderful are God's ways! It almost appears as if through all the years, and amidst our deep unhappiness and deeper wrong, He has been working to this end. See! Joseph is climbing the ladder to the pigeon-house. Then a message has come from Ranf! Yes; the bird is in his hand, and he is descending with it. I must go to them."

She was about to leave the room when she turned to Harold, and said, holding out her hand to him,—

“I forgive you, and I believe in what you have told me. It was not in your power to help my beloved sister, or you would have done so—I am sure you would have done so.”

“I would have laid down my life in her cause,” said Harold, in a low sweet tone; “you honour and comfort me by allowing me to touch your hand.”

“When you leave here to-night,” said Margaret, “do you go back to Mauvain?”

“No,” replied Harold; he had not told her the personal particulars of his interview with Mauvain, and she was not aware that Harold had renounced his friendship. “No; it may be that I shall never look upon his face again; it must be that he and I shall never more clasp hands in friendship.”

“You have quarrelled with him?”

“I have broken with him for ever. When I learnt from his own lips—as I did for the first time to-day—the true particulars of the part he had played in your sister’s life, I bade him farewell.”

“Then you have no home?”

“Absolutely,” said Harold, with a smile. “I shall have to-night to beg a shelter from the sky.”

“No,” said Margaret. “Stop with us—at least for a little while. I will explain to my husband and children as much as is necessary to ensure you an honest welcome.”

“I accept with gratitude. It will do me good to sleep for a night beneath your roof.”

With a motion expressive of gratification at his acceptance of her hospitality, Margaret hastened from the room into the garden. Joseph and Evangeline were walking towards the house, but seeing Margaret, paused till she came up to them.

“See, mother,” said Joseph; “a message from the mountains. Hold the bird while I unloosen the paper. There; the message is to you, mother. Read it.”

Margaret moved to a patch of moonlight, and read,—

“Ranf to Margaret Sylvester: The time has come. A great happiness is in store

for you. Last night, as you know, a ship anchored in the bay. To-morrow, at sunset, come you and your son Joseph to the hut in the mountain, from which you will see a flag flying. Let no one else accompany you. I know that you have to-day visited Mauvain. Believe nothing that you have heard in that house; for their own purposes, and to gain their own ends, those men will lie and lie; but the more subtle villain of the two is Harold—as I shall prove to you to-morrow. Let no person know what is in this paper, and bid your family not to retire to rest to-morrow night until you return from your visit to the mountain. You will have that to do upon your return, and that to see, which will bring joy into your life—and a more sacred joy into the life of Evangeline.”

Margaret read this missive twice, the first time in bewilderment, the second with a clearer comprehension. The supreme moment of her life appeared to be approaching, the moment of which she had dreamed, which she had yearned for,

hoped for, during all the years which had intervened since she lost her sister, but the issue of which was as completely hidden from her as the mystery of death itself. She accepted every word written by the hunchback as sincerest truth; there was in her mind neither doubt nor desire to question. "You will have that to do upon your return, and that to see, which will bring joy into your life—and a more sacred joy into the life of Evangeline." It would be so; every action of the hunchback's life proved that he would not utter what it was not in his power to accomplish. She looked up to the window of the room she had left, and saw Harold standing there with a tender smile upon his lips. "The more subtle villain of the two is Harold—as I shall prove to you to-morrow." Instinctively she drew Evangeline to her side, and passed her arm around the girl, as she would have done in the days gone by around Clarice, to protect her from evil. In the light of this startling revelation Harold's face grew distorted in her eyes; the story he had told her sounded

in her ears as a mockery; he was utterly, utterly false, and his very presence in her house was a danger to those she loved.

“Keep in the garden, Joseph,” she said hurriedly; “do not come in for a little while.”

She hastened into the house, and into the room in which she had left Harold. He advanced towards her with an expression of quick sympathy, almost of love, in his face. She pointed to the door.

“Go!” she said.

He caught his breath, and looked around as though another voice than hers had spoken.

“Do you not hear me?” she cried, her pulses throbbing with indignant passion. “Go! And never set foot within door of mine again. You are a false and shameless villain!”

He became grave instantly, and moved to the door. But before he left, he turned, and with a gentle, pitying smile, said,—

“It is useless to ask why you thrust me from your house?”

“Quite useless,” she replied, in her

sternest tone. "I shall pray that I may never look upon your face again!"

He made no further attempt to obtain an explanation, but passed from the room, saying,—

"May happiness attend you and yours to the last days of your lives!"

The next moment he was gone.

"My words have come true," he said, with a sad whimsical light in his eyes. "I shall have to beg shelter from the sky. Be merciful, clouds, and do not weep as you pass over my bed of leaves! Let me think—let me think! I shall have time, being alone now, quite alone, and without a friend. And there is Eternity before me—time enough, indeed! To whom am I indebted for Margaret Sylvester's extraordinary change of feeling? Easily answered. She received a message from Ranf; my name was doubtless mentioned in it, and not in flattery. I noticed Margaret's stern look as she stood in the moonlight, and raised her eyes to the window at which I was standing. Ranf is the friend I have to thank. I thank

you, friend. But you and I have not done with each other; the last page of the book is not yet reached. Whence came that tame white bird, with its false message hidden under its wing? From the mountain, or from the hunchback's fairy-house of wonders? The latter is the nearer; it may not be time lost to wander in that direction. If Ranf be there, he shall give me satisfaction."

Towards Ranf's new house Harold therefore directed his steps, and sauntered listlessly around its ring of wild flowers, watching for a human sign.

"I will not enter like a thief," he thought; "if I can convey to the hunchback's ears that I am here, he will not flinch from a meeting."

For an hour and more he lingered, and noticed through the hedges which Ranf had formed that there were lights in some of the windows of the house. At length he fancied he heard the rustle of a dress, and he called aloud, at a venture,—

"Bertha Christof!"

She stepped towards him, and replied,

“ Who calls ? ”

“ A friend. Let me speak with you ; you have nothing to fear.”

She approached with timid steps to within arm's-length of him, and he saw that his guess was correct when he called her name.

“ Whom do you seek ? ”

“ Ranf.”

“ He is not here ; he is on the mountain.”

“ Will it be difficult to find him ? ”

“ You will see a flag flying over his hut.”

“ I will seek him there—but not to-night. Do you remember my face, Bertha ? I was in the court-house when Ranf was on his trial.”

“ Yes ; I remember you.”

“ Bertha, this isle seems fatal to some. It condemned you to a life of loneliness ; so am I condemned.”

“ Are you alone ? ”

“ Utterly alone, and without a friend. So, for better fortune, shake hands with me.”

She gave her hand, and he held it in his for a moment, or two.

“And now, Bertha, I have a fancy. Bring me a flower from the grave of your child.”

“Wait—wait!” she cried, and ran from him, returning soon with a handful of flowers, which he placed in his bosom.

“I am not entirely forsaken,” he murmured, as he walked back into the woods, and laid himself down to sleep.

CHAPTER X.

MARGARET RECEIVES THE RECORD OF HAROLD'S
GUILT.

“MOTHER,” said Joseph, “Ranf’s flag is flying from the mountain top. It is far to go. You will scarcely have strength to reach it.”

“You do not know, my dear, of what I am capable. In the old world before your father and I met—and even afterwards for a time—I walked day after day, week after week, month after month, and was seldom more than healthfully fatigued. I have more than a woman’s strength, my dear; and were I weaker than I am, the purpose for which we are now treading these strange paths for the first time would not allow me to break down.”

“You did not show me the message you received from Ranf.”

“He desired me not to let any person see what he wrote. You will soon know all. Ranf is wise, and has been working for our happiness—for mine, and yours, and Evangeline’s.”

“For Evangeline’s!” repeated Joseph Sylvester softly to himself, and his mother smiled tenderly as she heard the loving murmur.

“You love Evangeline, my boy.”

“Yes, mother.”

“We have seen the growth of this love, my dear, and it has made us glad. We knew that you would speak to us when you deemed it right. And Evangeline loves you, with a soul’s pure love. It is the sweetest thing, my boy. But for your father’s love, my life would have been very dark. He met me in the days of my despair, and brought light to my heart.”

“You have seldom spoken of those old days, mother—and never freely. I have often been curious to hear. Sometimes I have asked father to tell me of them, and he has always replied, ‘Your mother will

“speak to you of them when the time serves ; but never refer to them unless she encourages you, for in doing so you will bring to her the memory of a terrible grief.’”

“They have ever been tender of me ; God will reward them.”

“He has rewarded them ; they are happy, as I am. You have made us so, mother.”

“It has not been a merit on one side, dear ; we have striven for each other. That is the truest happiness. When each strives for each, when each thinks for each, when each bears for each, then it is that love’s sweet labour produces the best and brightest flowers. I have had both love and sorrow in my days. During my early girlhood I and your grandfather, who died long before you were born, and one who was very, very dear to me—my sister Clarice, Joseph—travelled about the small villages and towns of the world, working for our living, sometimes not knowing to-day where food was to come from to-morrow. Our wandering life was

happy and beautiful, for love was with us, and lightened our toil. Then my father died, and being before his death misled as to the character of a man who professed to be our friend, left us to his guardianship and his care, until we arrived at an age when we should be able to protect ourselves from the snares which surround the innocent and pure in the world beyond the seas. Joseph, at that time, my heart, my life, my soul, was bound up in my sister Clarice, and when she was torn from me by treachery I felt as if hope and sweetness had fled for ever from the world. The errand we are on to-night concerns this dear and cherished being; a mystery is about to be unfolded, and I both yearn and dread to meet it. But Ranf's message should give me courage."

They walked on in silence until Joseph said, between his teeth,—

"Those who wronged you, mother—do they live?"

"If they did, and you knew them, what would you do?"

“They should render an account to me,” cried the young man; “they should not live to commit another wrong!”

“Heaven will punish them,” said Margaret solemnly. “No evil deed is ever committed without bringing in its train its just reward. Think of the story connected with this very mountain. The crime, the suffering of a life-time, and then in the end the Divine anger which proclaimed that the sinner shall be judged hereafter! Joseph!” she cried in terror, “what is that moving yonder?”

Joseph looked in the direction of Margaret’s outstretched arm. “I see nothing, mother. You have been frightened by a shadow.”

But, indeed, it was the form of a man of which Margaret had caught a transient glance—of a man weakened by fatigue and hunger, who was creeping slowly and wearily upwards. At the sound of Margaret’s voice, he dropped behind a jutting rock, and remained concealed until they were out of sight.

“Upon my honour,” he muttered, “I

never knew the value of food till now. It is really necessary. I can sympathize with the famished creatures I have met with here and there in my way through life, and have generally passed by without a thought. Poor devils! I am in the same plight as they have been. If some witch were to offer me a bone, I would throw myself on my knees in gratitude. Or a bottle of wine! That would be a more charitable gift. I have nothing to offer in return except the immortal part of myself, which, if I can arrive at its worth from the knowledge of the mortal part of myself, would not be reckoned a fair exchange for a meal. Harold, you are beginning to see something of life; all that is past has been comedy. This is grim tragedy. Well, it would have been a pity if you had passed away with what, I perceive now, has been but a limited experience. How weak I feel! I shall think myself fortunate if I reach the hunchback's gay flag with an hour's life in me. You have trained badly, Harold. Is it hunger that hurts you, my man? No, I swear it! If I could regain

the esteem of a woman, I should be content to yield my life without a pang."

Margaret and Joseph continued their upward way until they arrived at Ranf's hut, where the hunchback awaited them.

"Welcome to my mountain home," he said. "You look around in wonder. Well, there are better—and worse. This supplies all that I require, and it is enough for a man. See—in the roof are my birds, and here are goats that feed out of my hand. I am content; I have been able to do that upon which my heart was set. But it is not to talk of myself that I have asked you to take this toilsome journey. Joseph, leave us for awhile; I wished you to accompany your mother for her guidance and protection. What she learns from me is her secret, to be disclosed to others of her will; not of mine. Remain without until we call for you."

When Margaret and he were alone, Ranf said, "I have been setting my house in order. For years I have worked to a certain end, and to-night that end is reached. Margaret Sylvester, of all the

inhabitants of the Silver Isle you were the only one who, on my arrival here, appeared to regard me as a human creature, imbued with human feeling. On the first night of our meeting you offered me the hospitality of your house, and with your own hands you made me up a bed. But it was not that which won me; it was your likeness to a lady whom I met but once in the old world, and that under the strangest circumstances. I have no intention to occupy your time with a narration of my life and experiences; I have written them down in this packet, which I place now in your hands on this understanding: You will yourself read first what is herein written, and then, at your discretion, you will permit two other persons to read the record—Evangeline and another whom you will see before you sleep.”

“Another!” said Margaret. “Whom?”

“You will know very soon; it is not in accordance with my purpose to give you any other clue. I place the seal of secrecy upon the three persons to whom I have chosen to reveal

much of my outer and something of my inner life, and I leave it to you to decide whether you will keep or burn the record after you have made yourself acquainted with its contents. But its fate and its revelations are of small consequence in comparison with this Book which I now place in your hands."

Margaret received the Book with trembling hands. A flood of tears gushed from her eyes, and with almost inarticulate cries she pressed it to her lips, and kissed it again and again.

"My sister's Bible!" she sobbed. "My sister's Bible! Oh, my sister! my wronged, my darling sister! It is as if you were standing before me, as in the olden time, and we were children again! Clarice! Clarice! forgive me for my desertion of you! If I had known!—if I had known—!"

"Margaret Sylvester," said the hunchback, in a tone as gentle as the tenderest-hearted woman could have used, "no human being has less cause for reproach than yourself. But your sufferings will

soon be over ; and when in a few hours you reflect that, in the hands of a mighty mysterious Power, I have been the means of restoring peace to your wounded heart, understand that the only motive which has urged me on, and which fortune has so strangely favoured and helped to success, is the love, the infinite love, that I bear for Evangeline. When you read my record, you will better understand the meaning of the words I now utter. I found the Bible in my mother's hut, but it was by the merest accident—if you please to call it so—that I discovered the piteous Confession it cunningly concealed. These sheets were hidden between its pages. Do you recognize the writing ? ”

“ My sister's ! ” cried Margaret, seizing Ranf's hand, and kissing it. “ Oh, blessed chance that sent you to the Silver Isle ! ”

“ There is more than chance in it. It is destiny—which has led to the events of this night. In this hut, upon this lonely mountain, untrodden for generations, until to-day, by any human foot but mine, your sister's Confession was discovered by me.

I said in my message to you yesternight that I knew of your visit to Mauvain's house. I knew more—I knew that both Harold and Mauvain received you there. I am in ignorance of what passed between you, nor do I wish to be informed. It will not help us. As I have already said, I have worked to my end, and it is accomplished. But I said in the message conveyed by my white dove that, of the two, Harold was the more subtle villain, and that I would prove it to you by the words of your beloved sister. The proof is in your hand. It is my desire that you read her Confession before you depart from this hut to your happier home in the valley."

He sat a little apart from her whilst she read, and with a keen observant eye watched the varying emotions which her face betrayed. Sobs, infinite compassion, terrible indignation, all were there; and often she was so overcome and so blinded by her tears that for minutes she could not proceed. She heard every word she read; her sister's voice accompanied the written Confession of a heart's agony, and

when at length the end was reached, she raised her white face to the sympathizing face of Ranf, and whispered,—

“The child ! What became of my sister’s child ? ”

“If Nature does not lie,” replied the hunchback, “and if all proof and circumstance are not miraculously at fault, your sister’s child lives in Evangeline.”

“Oh, thou gracious God !” cried Margaret, sinking on her knees, and clasping her sister’s Bible to her bosom ; “I thank Thee for Thy wondrous mercy ! ”

With head bowed down to her breast, with her lips pressed to the blessed Book, she remained for some time in silent prayer, and Ranf did not disturb her.

She rose to her feet.

“That is all,” said the hunchback. “Hasten your steps home, and the moment you reach it, you and all who are dear to you, proceed without delay to the house I have built, over the portal of which in golden letters is inscribed the word, ‘Chrysanthos.’ Do as I bid you, implicitly, and without question. You will obey me ? ”

“Yes. I should not deserve to live if I hesitated.”

“You know now who it is who betrayed your sister. But for the evidence you hold in your hands, you might have found it difficult to believe that there existed on earth so plausible and smooth-tongued a villain. But the past is past. Let it die. A happy future is before you and yours.”

“I must tell you,” said Margaret. “Evangeline and Joseph are lovers.”

“I know it. Go quickly. If you knew what I could tell you, you would not linger a moment.”

“Will you not come with us?”

“No. I have work to do here. Good-night.”

“Good-night, dearest friend. How can I thank you?”

Before he was aware of her intention, she pressed him in her arms, and kissed him on the lips. Then she and Joseph took their departure. He watched them as they descended the mountain, and then, with his hand upon his mouth and eyes, re-entered his hut.

CHAPTER XI.

HAROLD AND MAUVAIN VISIT THE HUNCHBACK.

FOR some time he remained in contemplation, mentally reviewing the events of the years which had elapsed since his return to his mother's hut in Mauvain's forest, where he had found the dead woman and the sleeping child lying side by side.

"With my mother, as I thought," mused he, "died certain evidence connected with Evangeline which would never be brought to light. But another lives to supply it, and she is in the valley, waiting. Something still remains to do—to bring to Mauvain and Harold the knowledge of each other's treachery; when that is accomplished, my labours are at an end. By their own hands, or by the hands of the

judges of this isle, shall justice be dealt out to them. My work in life seems already to be over, and all that is left to me is to sit and watch the happiness of those I love, and who hold me, I believe, in something more than common regard. Evangeline and Joseph Sylvester will marry ; he has a strong arm and a stout heart, and will be able to guard his treasure from evil. My tender flower ! You will never know what I owe you, for none but I can realize the dark depths into which my soul was plunged when, in the presence of death, you opened your eyes and smiled upon me. That smile was like the bursting of a star within my heart, and the light it shed upon the dark and weary path I was treading shines clearly now. Yes, they will marry, and will pass their lives in the house I have built for them in the Valley of Lilies ; and by-and-by, perhaps, I shall hold a child within these arms—Evangeline's child ! And it will be taught to lisp my name in accents of affection. Eternal wonder of Nature ! To what end are you working in the ages yet to come, through life that is

ever sweet and love that is ever new ! For my life and for myself I thank you, wise mother of the world. You have given me a rich reward for my early years of misery. I am grateful. Shall I repine that a child of my blood has never wound its arms about my neck, and that my lips have never given or received a lover's kiss ? No ; let me rather rejoice that no being lives to bear my shape, and that my days have not been productive of evil."

At this point of his musings Ranf fancied he heard a sound without, and, going to the door of his hut, he threw it open. There was no moon, and there would be none, for a couple of hours ; darkness was falling upon the mountain.

"It is well," muttered Ranf, "that Margaret Sylvester has Joseph with her ; they will reach the valleys in safety, and I shall know by the lighting up of my house, 'Chrysanthos,' whether all is well. That will not be till midnight."

From where he stood he faced the Valley of Lilies, but he could not distinguish his house through the gathering darkness.

Mentally he followed the footsteps of Margaret and Joseph.

“They are now at the second hut,” he muttered; “there is no danger on the road.”

* * * * *

But lower down the mountain the mists had gathered more thickly, and lingered in the middle distance. Margaret and Joseph, hand clasped in hand, slowly pursued their way; they reached the second hut in safety, and half an hour afterwards, Joseph said,—

“In less than an hour we shall be home.” His heart glowed with love; although his mother was by his side, it was only of Evangeline he thought. As he spoke, the form of a man ascending the mountain brushed past them. Margaret uttered an exclamation of alarm.

“Who goes there?” was asked, in a man’s voice.

“Hush!” whispered Margaret; “I know that voice; do not answer it.”

But again the question was asked, “Who goes there? Speak, or my sword shall compel you.”

“Peaceable inhabitants of the isle,” replied Joseph, “who are not to be frightened by threats. Who are you that question so insolently?”

“It is Mauvain,” whispered Margaret.

The man caught the whisper. “You are right, whoever you may be,” said Mauvain; “and you can go your way in peace. Come you from the hunchback’s hut?”

“Yes.”

“I was told no mortal but he dare ascend this cursed mount.”

“It is the first time we ever set foot upon it.”

“It is the same with me; and shall be the last. He is at home, then, this crooked wonder?”

“You will find him in his hut at the top of the mountain,” said Joseph.

“Joseph,” cried Margaret, in terror, “what have you done? That man is Ranf’s enemy!”

“Ah, mistress, I recognize your voice,” said Mauvain; “it is true I am Ranf’s enemy. But if you think he is in any

secret danger from me, you are mistaken. What is done between us will be done openly. The hunchback can take care of himself."

"Aye," said Joseph. "Ranf is a match for more than one. It is better to be his friend than his enemy. If your errand is not peaceable, I should advise you to retrace your steps."

"Is the road upward passably safe?"

"There is a fair track to the top, made by Ranf, the work of many years; but care is needed."

"Mistress," said Mauvain, "did Harold visit you?"

"He did."

"And you are ready to worship him as a model of excellence and virtue?"

"You are villains, both of you," replied Margaret, with indignation; "your presence in this isle is a blot upon the land."

"You wrong the man who was once my friend," said Mauvain gently; "he is worthy both of friendship and love. It has never been my fate to meet with a

gentleman more deserving of trust and confidence. Good-night."

But neither Margaret nor Joseph returned the salutation, and Mauvain pursued his lonely way.

* * * *

Ranf once more fancied he heard the sound of a man's voice; it was faint and indistinct, but upon listening intently it came to his ears more clearly, and it was his own name he seemed to hear.

"Ranf! Ranf!"

He walked downwards in the direction of the sound, and cried, "Is it mortal or spirit who calls my name?"

"In honest faith," was the answer, "at this moment it is mortal; but if you are not quick, I shall lose my hold on earth, literally and spiritually."

Every foot of the mountain was familiar to the hunchback, and he knew that the voice proceeded from one of the most dangerous passes. He needed no light to guide him, and in a few moments he was on his knees by the side of a precipice over which the body of a man was hanging in

the most perilous position. The man had caught hold of the thin twisted roots of a slender tree, which by good fortune had been laid bare by the rains, but his hold was growing weaker, and his desperate grasp and endeavours to raise himself had loosened the earth about the young roots to such an extent that, if he had been left to himself, his fate would have been speedy and certain. Ranf peered into the man's face.

“Harold the sculptor!”

“Ranf the hunchback!”

Ranf spoke with a frown; Harold, in almost a blithe tone.

“Beg your life!” cried Ranf.

“I do, most humbly,” said Harold, with a faint laugh.

But before Ranf made this demand, his arm was around the sinking man.

“Gently, gently,” said Harold; “I am hurt. Ah! it is well. Take care; do not tear my vest; there are memorials here in the shape of flowers—flowers—from the grave—Oh, God, I thank thee!”

And being safe upon solid earth, Harold swooned away.

Ranf did not pause to decide upon his course of action. He raised the insensible body, and bore it to his hut, where he laid it upon his bed.

“Not dead,” he muttered, as he placed his hand upon Harold’s heart. “What are these? Flowers, as he said, and not quite withered. From whose grave?”

Harold opened his eyes, and for a little while the men gazed at each other in silence. Then Harold said faintly,—

“If I had been told that I should ever have owed my life to you, my friend and foe, I should have laughed in the speaker’s face. I so thoroughly hate and despise you that the obligation you have laid me under is somewhat of a bitter joke. Give me my flowers, Ranf. A short time since I was beginning to admire you; better than that, I was beginning, as I believed, to do you justice. But I have discovered that a deformed man is not necessarily a noble and exemplary being, and where once I despised, now I abhor you.”

“I would not have it otherwise,” said Ranf.

“To rob a man,” continued Harold, “at a critical crisis in his life of the respect and sympathy of a good woman—to do so by slander—is the work of a coward—and you are one! It was to tell you this that I determined to beard you in your den. Such as you deserve no better lodgment. In the dark, missing the path, I slipped, and found myself hanging between earth and—well, that point is yet to be made clear to my comprehension. Have you any food in your hut?”

“I have.”

“Give me some, and I will pay for it in my heart’s blood, or yours. I am at the present moment so weak and famished that if you were to press your fingers on my throat I should not have strength to resist an abrupt introduction into another world. I have not tasted food since yesterday morning. Without being much of an arithmetician, I should say I have a thirty-six hours’ hunger upon me; and as you may guess, hunchback, I have hitherto

lived upon the fat of the land, and have never known want—which makes my case worse than that of a poor wretch who is used to starvation. Then, I am hurt; my left arm is terribly gashed. Nay, let it alone; it will not be improved by your nursing. Give me food, coward and slanderer!”

Ranf placed food upon the table, and two bottles of wine, and Harold rose without assistance, and pouring into a wooden measure full half of a bottle, drank it in one long, deep, satisfying draught. Setting down the measure, he partook of the food, justifying his plea of hunger by the eagerness with which he ate.

“I am strong again,” he said; “I retract a word I have twice applied to you. Ranf, you are no coward—but you must have within your breast the heart of a fiend. As I was toiling up this mountain there passed by me a man and a woman. They almost discovered me, but I succeeded in keeping myself from their sight. Have they been here?”

“Yes.”

“It will not interest me to learn upon what errand—but it must have been a momentous one that a woman should be impelled to undertake such a journey.”

“Truly the mountain is growing in repute,” said Ranf; “this is a memorable day in its history. You have promised to pay for the food you have eaten in your heart’s blood, or mine. The payment will be sufficient; I shall exact it.”

“Nothing will please me better. But you are unarmed; I have my sword, as you see.”

Ranf produced two rapiers, and placed them on the table. “The moon is rising,” he said; “it will be light soon upon the mountain, and we shall find a piece of level ground without—an altar upon which you shall meet with justice. God has sent you here to meet it, and on this night, at this hour, of all nights and hours in our lives. I would not change shapes with you for the wealth of the stars. You are not worth even a hunchback’s hate.”

“It may be as you say,” said Harold thoughtfully, “and that this hour may be

my last. For my part, I am weary of life, and shall yield it up not unwillingly. But before we cross swords—I had no idea, Ranf, that you were skilled in fence, but you are admirable in everything, it seems—I would have something made plain to me. It will be light enough outside for our purpose, but light is required here”—he touched his breast. “Yesterday it was in my power to bring relief to the heart of a suffering woman.”

“Use names,” said Ranf sternly; “the time is past for subterfuge.”

“Not before yesterday was I made acquainted with the true particulars of the story of Margaret and Clarice; I learnt them in an interview with Mauvain, and, renouncing his friendship—I have touched you, I perceive; you are but a clumsy wizard, after all—I went at once to Margaret Sylvester, and revealed to her all that I had learned. For my innocent share in Clarice’s sad story—”

“Innocent share!” exclaimed Ranf, with deepest scorn; “you proclaim that to me, who but an hour ago gave that wronged,

unhappy woman's confession into the hands of her sister ! ”

“ For my innocent share,” repeated Harold, “ in that sad story, I do not hold myself blameless ; I am guilty, and deserve punishment and condemnation, but not at your hands, hunchback—at the hands of a higher Power. Yet have I done no wrong, and had I known what I have lately learnt, I would have shed my best blood in Clarice's service. Never was man more repentant, never was man more heart-stricken than I when, won to Margaret Sylvester's side by her saintly devotion and courage, I went to her house, and related to her all that I knew. Will it help you to an understanding of my feelings if I tell you that I loved Clarice with a most earnest love, and that if I had not been misled and deceived by my friend, her life might have been happy and honoured ? Take it for what you deem it worth—it is the truth. Then, when Margaret Sylvester, judging me by an inward light, and believing in my sympathy and my sorrow, held out to me the hand of

forgiveness—when, knowing I had no roof to cover me, no soul to speak to in all the length and breadth of this Silver Isle, she begged me to accept—Heaven bless her for it!—the hospitality of her home—you, by a slanderous message, destroyed my hope, and robbed me of the sweetest comfort that was ever offered to the heart of an unhappy man. What was in your message concerning me?”

“I told her that I knew she had visited Mauvain; I warned her to believe not a word she heard from your lips or from Mauvain’s; I said that for your own purposes you would lie and lie, and that of the two you were the more subtle villain—as I should prove to her by the written testimony of her own sister.”

“I can understand now why she turned me from her house. But if you have done me a wrong and come to the knowledge of it, you would right me.”

“You, or any man.”

“Have you proved to Margaret Sylvester what you promised?”

“I have proved it to her this very

night. She departed from this hut with the proofs of your villainy in her possession."

"Ranf, you are mad—or dreaming." Ranf smiled scornfully. "There is here a deeper mystery than any I have encountered. It must not remain so. My honour is at stake. Deal with me fairly, as man to man. Cast aside for a little while all suspicion of me, and assist me to probe the heart of this mystery. I met Clarice first by accident, in Mauvain's company, on the night on which she and Margaret were treacherously separated. From that night I saw neither her nor Mauvain for two years, and when we met again she and Mauvain were together. I saw that Clarice was unhappy—that she had a secret grief, and at times I urged her, out of the deep respect and sympathy I had for her—out of the deep love I bore her, but of which I never insulted her by speaking—to confide in me. Honestly I desired to help her; but she kept her heart closed, saying sometimes that of all men in the world I was the man she would have chosen to confide in, had

not her faith and trust in human nature been irretrievably shattered. Farther than that I never went; nor did she. To the last day I beheld her I treated her with such tenderness and respect as I would have treated an honoured sister. Now, what grounds have you for slandering me, and for bringing her name in injurious connection with mine?"

"Did Mauvain have another friend of the name of Harold?"

"None other."

"Had you a friend bearing your name?"

"No."

"The testimony which convicts you is written by Clarice herself in a Bible given to her by her father; that Bible is now in Margaret Sylvester's hands. It is in the form of a diary, written by Clarice from day to day, in which she describes the manner in which she was wooed and betrayed. That record is one of incredible baseness, and the name of her lover and betrayer is freely used. The name is Harold—and you are he!"

“As there is a heaven above us, and a God around us,” cried Harold, “whatever name is there written, it is not I! Do you know the truth when you hear it, or is your mind as crooked as your body? Again I repeat, I treated Clarice as an honoured sister. Except in believing what Mauvain told me of her, I never wronged the suffering girl in thought or deed!”

Ranf gazed steadily at Harold, who met his gaze unflinchingly.

“If what you say is true,” said Ranf, “you have been grievously slandered—but not by me, nor by Clarice. Search your mind for a clue.”

“I can find none.”

“Absolutely none?”

“Absolutely none.”

A singular smile crossed Ranf’s lips, and he inclined his head to the door. “Do you hear nothing?”

“Nothing.”

“My ears have been more keenly trained to sound than yours. There are steps upon the mountain—listen now; they are approaching, nearer—nearer.” He threw

open the door; the mountain was bathed in moonlight—and coming up the path was a man whose face was set towards the hut. “You should know him,” said Ranf.

“It is Mauvain,” said Harold, almost in a whisper.

“It is Mauvain,” replied Ranf. “Can you not find a clue in your mind to this false use of your name? if it be false, as you may soon discover. Is it not possible that Clarice’s lover for some time concealed his own name, and wooed her in the name of an absent friend? The deception could not be kept up for ever, and when it was confessed, it neither lessened nor added to her shame. Say that this is possible—what near friend would occur to your mind as likely to use you for his purpose?”

“Mauvain!” cried Harold.

“Aye, Mauvain,” said Ranf.

And at that moment Mauvain came straight through the moonlight, and stood upon the threshold of the hut.

CHAPTER XII.

THE CHALLENGE.

“WELCOME,” said Ranf, with a bright glitter in his eyes. “Had you timed your visit with mathematical precision it could not have been more opportune. I never hoped for the honour of receiving Mauvain beneath roof of mine; this is a night in my life not to be forgotten.”

Mauvain did not immediately speak; the presence of Harold surprised him, and he looked from one to the other in irresolution and doubt. Harold said no word, but kept his eyes fixed upon Mauvain’s face, with a stern and thoughtful meaning.

Ranf continued: “Have you come to bring me news from the old world? I left so many friends there, who are doubt-

less anxious for my welfare ! It is long since we met, Mauvain ; you have aged. I miss a certain brightness in you ; hearing footsteps on the mount, I observed that they lacked elasticity and lightness ; and, indeed, your whole manner is wanting in gaiety. Without doubt your journey must have fatigued you, but you have certainly aged ; your time is coming ! Mauvain, there is wine ; I have drunk at your expense ; drink now at mine. No ? Well, I confess it is presumptuous in me to expect the condescension. To business, then. What brings you here ? ”

“ I am here,” said Mauvain deliberately, “ to punish a knave for presumption, and to teach him that it is dangerous to use the name of his betters as freely as I have reason to suppose you have used mine.”

“ There are more ways than one of using names,” retorted Ranf, “ as you may presently learn.”

“ Were you what you once were,” said Mauvain, “ a serf and dependent of mine, I would have you whipped.”

“As you have had others, standing by the while to enjoy the torture and the degradation of what was possibly a higher nature than you own. Such enjoyment cannot now be yours; we are in a free land. How, then, do you propose to punish my presumption? By physical or moral force? In either case, Mauvain, you would find yourself at a disadvantage.”

“I cannot lift you to my level; I descend to yours. You have rapiers on the table. I commence my lesson thus.” He raised his jewelled cane, and was advancing towards Ranf when Harold interposed.

“This quarrel is mine, Mauvain; you must first give me satisfaction.”

Mauvain recoiled, and his cane dropped to the ground.

“I thought, Harold, we had settled our affairs.”

“So thought I; but within this last hour I have had cause to believe that you have fixed a deeper wrong upon me than any I have endured.”

“Within this last hour! Then you have heard it from the lips of that knave!”

“It is through Ranf I have learnt it.”

“And you would set his word against mine, Harold!”

“No. Am I free to speak, Ranf?”

“Entirely free. It is your honour that is at stake, not mine.”

“If I find you have deceived me, your life shall answer for it.”

“This is no time for threat or boast. Settle first with him. He will neither lie nor equivocate; if he does either, I have a witness in the valley below”—he looked out of the door, which was open; the mists were rolling away, and the moonlight shone over the lovely plains—“I have a witness in the valley below who will bring his shame and his guilt home to him.”

“You are in league, I perceive,” said Mauvain haughtily. “What deeper wrong than any you have advanced have I done you?”

“If what I suspect is true,” said Harold, “you have used my friendship for a base

and shameful purpose. Once more I recall the name of Clarice. You know in what esteem I held her. You know I loved her, and how, by means of your own calumnious words with respect to her, I lost my faith in woman's purity. Was it necessary that you should be guilty of a double betrayal? Was it necessary to your purpose that you should woo an innocent, trusting, helpless girl, and bring her to shame, in the name of a friend, concealing your own because you were fearful of using it?"

A deadly pallor crept over Mauvain's face.

"Learn something more," said Ranf to Harold; "in that friend's name a ceremony was performed which Clarice believed was an honourable marriage. It was a trick, worthy of what had gone before."

Harold's lips quivered at this new testimony, and his face grew as white as Mauvain's.

"I await your answer," he said. "Did you thus use my name, and conceal your

own? You will not speak? By Heaven you shall!"

Mauvain raised his hand gently.

"There is no need for violent words, Harold," he said in a low, soft voice. "What I did was done with no intent to injure you."

"Jesuit!" cried Harold. "I will have an answer straight to the point! Did you woo Clarice, and go through a false marriage with her, in my name? Answer, as you are a gentleman—yes or no!"

"Yes."

Harold covered his face with his hands, as though to shut out the consciousness of villany so base. For a minute or two there was silence. Then Harold rose, and saying sternly, "There remains but this," took one of the rapiers from the table, and pointed outside. "Ranf, you will conduct us to your plot of level ground—your altar of justice. Come," he said to Mauvain, "there is no question of inequality between us."

But Mauvain did not stir. "I cannot fight with you, Harold," he said tenderly.

“You must! There is no escape for you or me. It is the last night on earth for one.”

Mauvain looked at him with wistful, imploring eyes.

“Harold!”

“You hesitate still! Coward!” And with his open hand, Harold struck Mauvain full in the face.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE DUEL ON THE MOUNT.

THE hunchback conducted them to the extreme summit of the snow mountain, which from the plains assumed the appearance of a sharp peak; but in reality its surface was a level piece of table-land of about twenty yards in circumference. The area was small, but sufficient for the purpose of the combatants, who were aware that for one of them at least life's minutes were numbered. The eastern edge of this plot of land defined the boundary-line between earth and air; eternity lay a hair's-breath beyond it. The outer rocks which faced the sea were there, and a false step would be fatal to him who took it. Ranf pointed out the danger, to which neither Mauvain nor Harold attended. Face to face they stood,

holding their naked rapiers, at the points of which death was waiting. But few words passed between these enemies, who once were friends.

“This must be, Harold?” asked Mauvain.

“It must be,” replied Harold.

With the full consciousness that only one of the two would depart from that spot alive, Mauvain simply acted on the defensive; the blades crossed and clashed, but Mauvain contented himself with parrying Harold’s thrusts. Thus, the combat was one-sided, and in the natural order of things—Harold being a skilful swordsman—could have but one result. It was not long in declaring itself. Harold’s rapier found its way to Mauvain’s heart, and Mauvain staggered and fell to the earth. Harold was instantly by his side, striving to stop the blood which was gushing from the wound.

“It is useless, Harold,” said Mauvain, with a tender smile; “you have killed me. I thank God that I die by the hand of a gentleman!”

The mists had rolled away from the mountain, and the Silver Isle lay in radiant beauty beneath them. Mauvain beckoned to Ranf.

“I am not acquainted,” he said, pressing his hand to his side, “with the laws of the isle respecting encounters such as this. It may be that Harold will be called upon to answer for my death, if the particulars of the duel come to the knowledge of the islanders. There is no need to enlighten them. You are a clever knave; invent some story which will divert suspicion from my friend, who, out of a singular quixotism, has brought me to this pass.”

“Have you any message,” asked Ranf, glancing to the Valley of Lilies, “for Clarice?”

“For Clarice!” exclaimed Mauvain, faintly. His voice came and went, and it was with difficulty he spoke. “You jest!”

“Or for your child?”

“My child!” Surprise gave Mauvain strength, and he partially raised himself, and gazed in bewilderment at the hunchback. “There is no child. She is dead.”

“She lives,” said Ranf, “as Clarice does.”

“Clarice’s child!” gasped Mauvain. “Is this man mocking me, Harold?”

“He speaks Heaven’s truth, Mauvain, as I solemnly believe. But what he knows of Clarice is beyond my comprehension.”

“Look below,” said Ranf to Harold, pointing to the Valley of Lilies; “if your sight is good, you can distinguish the outlines of my house—no longer mine, but Evangeline’s. I had it so built that from this height it should be within view. See—every window of the house is lighted up, as I directed. At this moment, two sisters are meeting, each of whom believed the other dead—two sisters cruelly torn from each other’s arms in their youth. Clarice and Margaret are reunited, nevermore, I trust, to be separated on earth. Do you understand me, Mauvain?”

“I understand you, dimly—go on—I have still a few moments’ life in me! Is this reunion your work?”

“It is my work. When first, by your

help, I brought your daughter, Evangeline, to the Silver Isle—”

“My daughter! Evangeline! You have a fine sense of humour, hunchback; but you cannot fasten upon me, by any art of yours, a child so hideous. I see your marble image of her now, Harold, and that of this deformed villain, bending over the water in the basin! It will not do, hunchback. Hold me a moment, Harold; I am fainting! I want to live to hear the end of this clever knave’s monstrous invention.”

From a flask which Ranf handed to him, Harold touched the lips of Mauvain and bathed his forehead, and presently the dying man opened his eyes.

“I remember what has passed, Harold; let me hear the rest quickly.”

“I deceived you, Mauvain,” said Harold; “Evangeline is the most beautiful maiden on the Silver Isle. It was chiefly for this reason that I wished to destroy the group I cut for you.”

“Why did you deceive me?”

“I loved Clarice, and, suspecting the

truth when I first beheld the child you believed to be Ranf's, I welcomed the opportunity you unconsciously offered to her of growing to womanhood surrounded by more innocent and peaceful influences than those among which we moved."

"So—we are quits, then—you deceived me, as I deceived you. And the child lives,—and is beautiful! She could not be otherwise. I thank you, friend. See how easily I forgive you for your deceit, Harold; forgive me for mine!"

"I no longer bear resentment, Mauvain; I forgive you."

"You remove a weight from my heart, Harold. Hunchback, if you are not speedy with your tale, I shall have to learn it for myself in the world of spirits."

"When, by your help," said Ranf, "I brought your daughter, Evangeline, to the Silver Isle, and placed her in the care of her mother's sister, Margaret Sylvester, I (not knowing the truth at the time) had no expectation or hope that such a happy ending would be reached as we have reached this night."

“Mine, for one,” said Mauvain, with a grim, faint laugh; “you phrase well, hunchback.”

“But chance placed in my hands the clue to a mystery which I determined, if possible, to solve, and Nature gave me the means to compass my desire. Such wealth is mine, Mauvain, which you have never dreamed of, and by its aid agents have been working for me in the old land, leading to the discovery of Clarice, who was brought to the isle two days since, and is now with her sister Margaret and her child, Evangeline, in the house I built for them in the Valley of Lilies. There is no more to tell.”

“And no time to tell it,” said Mauvain, his voice growing fainter and fainter. “Harold, when you see Clarice, say that I am dead, and ask her to think kindly of me if she can. And for my child—what can I have to say to her? She owes me nothing that I would wish her to repay. She is beautiful, you tell me, Harold—so was Clarice, the fairest and most beautiful! Hunchback, you have won the game;

Evangeline will hold you in kinder remembrance than she will the man who betrayed—that is the word, is it not?—her mother. . . . There is a strange haze over the sky. . . . Harold, give me your hand.”

“It is in yours, Mauvain,” said Harold, lowering his head so that he might catch Mauvain’s last words.

“I noticed that your left arm was hurt, Harold—does it pain you?”

“Not much, Mauvain.”

“You were right when you said that our life on the isle was likely to be attended with excitement and amusement This blood chokes me. I really believe, if Clarice were here, that I should ask her to kiss me. I should like to see Evangeline, too What a trick you played me! It is growing dark, is it not? Do you know, Harold, that there is not a being on earth I cling to as I cling to you—for I love you—in my way! Nothing very desirable, but it is so. When you left me yesterday morning, I felt as if the best part of my life had gone from me. . . .

Harold, who is it who stands before me, looking downwards to the valley?"

"It is Ranf."

"He stands between me and the light. Go to his side, and tell me if you can see the house which contains Clarice and Margaret and my—my daughter, Evangeline. Go—quickly!"

Harold obeyed him, and moved to Ranf's side. He was gone for but a moment—and when he set his face towards the spot upon which his friend had been lying, Mauvain had disappeared!

"Ranf!" cried Harold.

The hunchback turned, and divined what had occurred. He leant over the eastern edge of the peak, and saw the lifeless body of Mauvain falling from rock to rock.

"Farewell, Mauvain," he murmured.

"So ends the comedy of your life."

Harold shuddered as he gazed upon the snow, stained with Mauvain's life's blood.

"Heaven have mercy upon him," he said, "and upon me!"

Fascinated by the stains of blood and by the events of the night, he stood for many minutes in silence, until Ranf gently touched his arm.

“Come,” said Ranf.

“Where?” asked Harold.

“To my hut. Did you not say that I had robbed you of the sweetest comfort that was ever offered to the heart of an unhappy man? I would restore it to you.”

“Ah, true. You robbed me of Margaret Sylvester’s esteem. Yet I cannot go to her to vindicate myself, for I have a duty here to perform which must be done to-night, at all hazards.”

“What duty?”

“Do you think that I shall allow Mauvain’s body to lie unburied on the beach below? It would weigh as a sin upon my soul through all my days.”

“How do you propose to reach the beach?”

“I shall find a way.”

“Certain death is yours, if you attempt it.”

“That will not deter me,” said Harold scornfully. “I know what it is right for a man to do.”

"Only one man in the isle can show you the way to its accomplishment."

"That man is yourself. I am prepared for your answer."

"You are right. That man is myself. Sculptor Harold, from whose grave did you obtain those flowers in your breast, of which you are so tender?"

"From the grave of Bertha's child. I went last night to your house in the valley, on the chance of finding you there, and compelling you to do me justice in Margaret Sylvester's eyes. I did not enter, but waited until I heard a human sound. I saw Bertha, and spoke with her. She told me you were here. Before I left her I asked her for these flowers, as a kind of comfort to me on my way. She gave them to me, willingly. Nay, more; she gave me her hand, and I held it in mine. You see, Ranf, I was not entirely forsaken."

"I have done you great wrong. Will you take my hand?"

"Willingly. The wrong you did was unintentional. From this moment we are friends."

"It is said, and sealed." The two men

grasped each other firmly by the hand. "I will help you to your wish. I know a way down the mountain, and I will show you a cave of wonders, a cave paved with golden sand, by means of which I have been enabled to restore Clarice to her sister's arms."

"Nothing will surprise me, Ranf. I am curious to know why you choose to remain here, alone, instead of being present at the meeting of the sisters."

"I should have been but a clog on their happiness. It would have been as if I said, 'Here am I here who have accomplished this wonder; pay me tribute.' It would have been a shock to Clarice, who has seen me but once (you seem to forget what kind of man I am to the outward eye), and who would not have understood. No. Such a meeting is sacred; heart must speak to heart, soul to soul. It would have been the very essence of selfishness had I intruded myself."

"You speak like a man—no, rather like a woman, for you have a woman's delicacy. Ranf, is it low tide?"

“Yes,” replied Ranf, knowing the thought that prompted the question. “But first, come with me to my hut. I have to send a message to Margaret Sylvester.”

“You are a magician.”

“Because of my white doves? Think, rather, that they are heaven’s messengers. I have two in my hut which have been trained to fly between the mount and my house in the valley. Bertha, who is ever on the alert—no more grateful woman ever drew Nature’s breath—will receive it, and carry it to the sisters, and thus you will hold this night a place in their perfect happiness.”

The message which Ranf wrote, and tied under the pigeon’s wing, ran thus :

“From Ranf to Margaret Sylvester :

“You know already from the lips of your sister Clarice that an unintentional wrong has been done to Harold the sculptor. You know that Mauvain was the man who wronged her. Harold is with me now, and Mauvain will never trouble you more. Harold and I are

friends till death. I have asked his pardon for the wrong I did him, in causing you to withdraw your sympathy and friendship from him. I honour and love him. You will do so when you know him as I now know him. Our love to you, and all."

Harold and Ranf watched the flight of the white dove towards the Valley of Lilies, and Harold thought,—

"The message will be read by the sisters in the midst of their happiness. I share it with them. Undeserving as I am, a great joy is mine!"

* * * * *

"I honour and love him. You will do so when you know him as I now know him."

But it was never to be, on earth. In their mortal shape they were never to meet again.

* * * * *

"All is ready," said Ranf; "let us start. The tide is beginning to rise."

"I have a fancy," said Harold; "you have another pigeon which, being released,

will wing its way to your house in the valley?"

"Yes."

"Bring it with you; it is but a fancy, but you will indulge me."

"Willingly," and Ranf strapped to his back the small basket containing the pigeon. "Now we are ready."

On their way Ranf narrated how, some years ago, in his eagerness to obtain a rare flower, he had slipped over the precipice, and had nearly met his death; and how, being saved by a tree which grew outwards to the sea, he had discovered a means to reach the shore which lay thousands of feet beneath them. Harold scarcely attended to Ranf's narration; he was thinking with sadness of the body of Mauvain lying on the sands below.

"What was it you told me awhile ago?" asked Harold listlessly. "A cave of wonders, paved with golden sand?"

"It is so," replied Ranf; "beneath us, within reach of man's hands, lies the wealth of a kingdom."

"You might have achieved rare things,

Ranf, with such power in your possession."

"I have achieved what I desired," said Ranf; "the happiness of the being I love. In the knowledge that that is secured, I could almost be content never to see her again on earth. There is a hereafter; this life is but as a passing breath." They had reached the point from which the chain depended sheer over the rocks which faced the sea. "We have to descend by this chain. It is firm, and will not break. The danger is in the man. Will you risk it?"

"There is a hereafter, Ranf, as you say. Fear of death will not deter me from the execution of my purpose."

"You had best go first; when you reach the bottom of the chain you will find an opening into which you can swing yourself. The reason I send you before me is that I can help you from above. Let me wind this rope around your breast and waist. So! It is done. You can trust your full weight to the rope; if you miss your hold of the chain, I shall have you

safe; the rope is twice the length of the chain, and my strength will be sufficient. You will to a certainty be bruised and cut, but you will not mind a scratch or two. You will find steps hewn here and there in the rocks; take advantage of them, and do not look downwards."

Harold unhesitatingly committed himself to the perilous enterprise; step by step he descended, with his teeth firmly clenched to prevent himself from expressing the agony he was enduring—for his wounded arm smarted terribly in the strain to which it was subjected. The cheery voice of Ranf did much to strengthen and encourage him, but by the time he reached the end of the chain and had swung himself into the opening of the rocks, his strength was gone; and when Ranf joined him, he was lying on the ground, bleeding and exhausted. Ranf had come prepared, and the contents of his flask helped to revive the fainting man.

"Shall we go on?" asked Ranf.

"While I have a breath of life in me," replied Harold, "I will not turn; not a

conscious moment must be wasted. Come, I am stronger now."

And, indeed, the colour returned to his cheek; his strong will, so rarely exercised, enabled him to conquer his pain. With his hand in Ranf's he followed the hunch-back into the dark tunnels of the mountain. When the light of the moon was shut out Ranf lighted a torch, which threw a lurid glare on the downward path. Descending and ever descending they walked slowly on, until they reached the cleft in the rock through which they obtained a view of the sea.

"The aspect of the night has changed," said Harold; "should the moon be now in the sky?"

"Aye," said Ranf, "for at least two hours yet."

"It is hidden. Darkness is falling on the waters; they are strangely troubled."

Ranf looked out; he understood the signs. The sea was rolling heavily, and a threatening murmur was in the air.

He had had experiences of such storms as that which was now approaching, and he

knew that the danger of the enterprise upon which they were engaged was increased tenfold by the signs he saw and heard ; but he knew also that no persuasion could induce Harold to falter in his purpose. So in silence they resumed their way. There were other openings in the mount as they descended, but no light came through them ; a deep darkness was on earth and air and sea. "The storm will break presently," thought Ranf.

"What is that sound, Ranf ?"

"It is the sound of falling water," said Ranf, kneeling to loosen a chain fastened to the rocks ; "when I first heard it, in the past, I thought it sweetest music. Hold !" he cried, as Harold, in his eagerness, advanced a step beyond him. "We are on the edge of a chasm, which we must descend by means of this chain. Let me fasten the rope about you again. Keep a firm grasp on the chain, and trust blindly to it and me ; it is but fifty feet down. Now !"

In a few minutes Harold had descended the chasm, and reached a point of safety. As his foot touched the solid rock, a flash

of lightning pierced the chasm, filling it with vivid light, and he realized the danger he had escaped. In the same moment he saw Ranf scrambling down the chain.

“Hark!” cried Ranf, standing by Harold’s side.

A terrible peal of thunder broke over the sea; the sound rushed into the chasm with awful import, and, broken up into fierce and sullen mutterings, wandered through the dark caverns long after it had died out in the open space beyond. A great exaltation possessed Harold’s being as he listened to Nature’s mighty voice. Every pulse in his body beat with spiritual excitement.

“Destiny must have led you to the discovery of this path,” he said to Ranf.

“It seemed so to me when I first trod it,” replied Ranf. “Destiny may be leading us now to something more certain than what has yet befallen us.”

“To what?”

“To death!”

“What matters?” exclaimed Harold, with a wild wave of his hand. “Our work in life is over.”

“True. Our work is over. Harold, you are covered with blood. You must be in terrible pain.”

“I feel none. The littleness and the agony of life are worth suffering when they lead to such a moment as this. Almighty God! With what sublimity the dark waves rush upon the eternal rocks below! And Mauvain—where is he?”

“We may know soon,” said Ranf quietly.

Slowly and laboriously they pursued their way until they reached a point from which they overlooked the wondrous caves along the shore. Harold could but dimly trace their outlines. They were wrapt in darkness.

The heavens were overcast with sullen clouds. The tide was rising, and the sea was lashed to fury.

“What now, Harold?” asked Ranf.

“I must descend to the shore, to seek for Mauvain’s body. It would fall at this point?”

“Yonder,” said Ranf, taking Harold’s right arm, and extending it towards the

east, "in front of those monstrous masses of seaweed which are curling furiously upwards—"

His words were arrested by the breaking of the storm. The lightning darted into the brown, writhing coils; deafening peals of thunder instantaneously followed, and the rain poured down in a mighty flood.

"They look like an army of giant serpents convulsed in a supreme death-struggle," said Harold.

"The eastern edge of the summit of the mountain over which Mauvain fell, is in a direct line with that spot. It is madness to attempt to recover the body. If it is not dashed to pieces, it is already carried out to sea."

"You promised to help me."

"I do not retract. It is for you now to direct what is to be done."

"You see I have kept the rope about my body. I shall venture to that spot; you can prevent me from being carried out to sea if you will wind the end of the rope around you. You want a resistant point; you cannot obtain it on these rocks."

“ You have heard the legend of the snow mountain, with which the Evangeline who died two centuries ago is connected ? ”

“ Yes.”

So fearful was the storm that the men were compelled to speak in whispers, with their faces almost touching.

“ A few feet below us — Wait till the lightning comes — There ! you saw that huge mass of wood fixed in the crevices of the rocks ? ”

“ Yes.”

“ It is the Cross carved out of a pine-tree by the man who slew his brother, and wrecked the happiness of an innocent girl’s life. I can obtain my resistant point there — I can cling to an arm of the Cross, holding the rope, while you go outward on your wild, unreasonable quest. There is not a moment to be lost. The tide is rising fast, and the storm has not yet reached its height.”

Swiftly they descended to the sands, with the waves dashing furiously upon them. Ranf, clinging with all his strength to the Cross, and with the end of the rope

wound round his waist, gave the word to Harold to speed.

Almost blinded by the water, but indomitable in his resolve, Harold ran out towards the rock, above which the monstrous coils of sea-weed curled and reared. The receding waves afforded him a few moments' respite, and he wiped the water from his eyes, and looked eagerly around. He saw no trace of Mauvain's body, but as the waves rolled inwards to the golden caves, he fancied he saw a shapeless form in a crevice; he darted forward wildly, and was instantly engulfed in the furious rush of the sea.

So fierce and sudden was the movement that he dragged Ranf from his shelter, and the next moment they were fighting for dear life. They were dashed against and over the rocks, and were terribly wounded—wounded even to death's point. But Ranf, in the blind delirium of his struggles, preserved some kind of consciousness, and, clinging with desperation and with the strength of a giant to the rocks, he prevented himself from being carried out to

sea. Taking advantage of the seaward roll of the waves, he crawled inwards to the golden caves, dragging Harold with him. He regained his shelter, and then, with his life ebbing from him, he slowly hauled in the rope, and with it Harold's body. He pressed it close to him, and by a supreme effort, succeeded in climbing with his lifeless burden into an arm of the Cross, where they were safe from the rush of the merciless sea. Almost on the instant the fury of the storm began to pass away, and in a little while the heavens were bright again with calm and beautiful clouds.

* * * * *

Harold moved, and languidly opened his eyes.

"In this world," he thought, "or the next?"

A whisper reached him.

"Harold!"

"Ah, Ranf! Alive?"

Their voices were very faint.

"It is as much as I can say; life is going quickly. And you?"

“We are comrades ; I cannot live another hour.”

“Good-night, then.”

“Not yet. . . . Ranf ! ”

“Yes.”

“You have the dove with you ? ”

Ranf feebly moved his hand to his back ; the basket was there, and he felt the fluttering of the pigeon’s wings.

“It is here, Harold.”

“Have you strength to write a word to our friends in the Valley of Lilies ? ”

The question—the intention conveyed in it—gave him the strength.

“I can do it, Harold.”

“You have no paper.”

“Yes, wrapt in an oilskin. . . . I have always carried it about me. . . . What shall I write ? ”

“Farewell. From Ranf and Harold, friends in death. We shall meet in the Hereafter.”

With difficulty the words were traced. Ranf took the dove, scarcely alive, from the basket, and attached the message beneath its wing. He pressed his lips to

the bird, and placed it to Harold's lips. Then he set it free.

In the fresh pure air, the bird soon regained its strength. In a few moments it was gone—on its way to the Valley of Lilies where Margaret and Clarice were sleeping in each other's arms.

* * * * *

The sun rose above the eastern horizon. A blush tinged the bosom of the Silver Sea.

“Harold!”

“Aye.”

“I was wrong. . . . I said Good-night. . . . Can you see the light of the rising sun?”

“I do not know. . . . I see a light, thank God! but it is in my soul, not in my eyes. Good-morning, friend!”

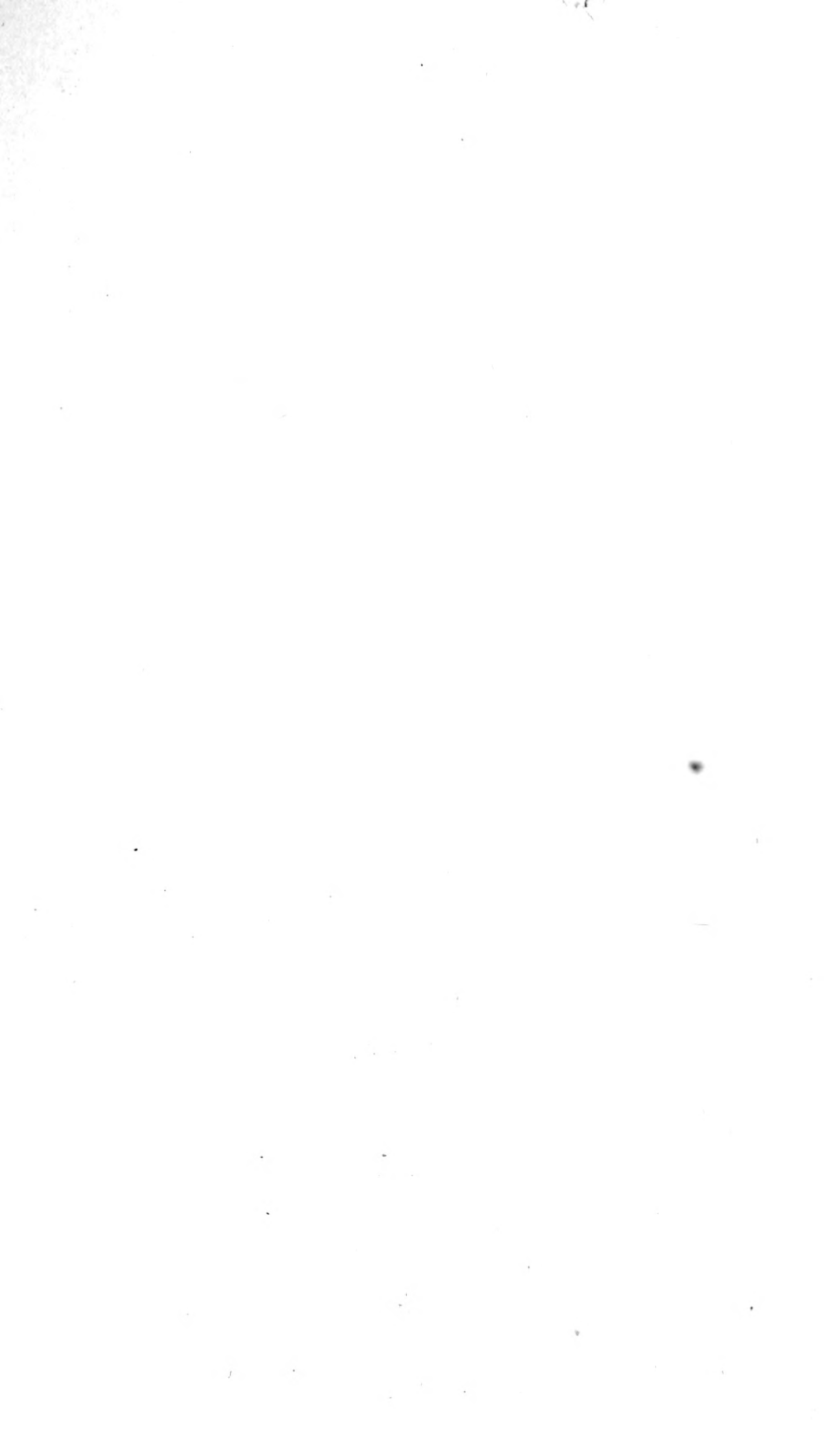
“Good-morning, friend!”

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The sea was bathed in rosy light, and the sun shone upon the white faces of Harold and Ranf as they lay in the Cross fixed in the golden caves!

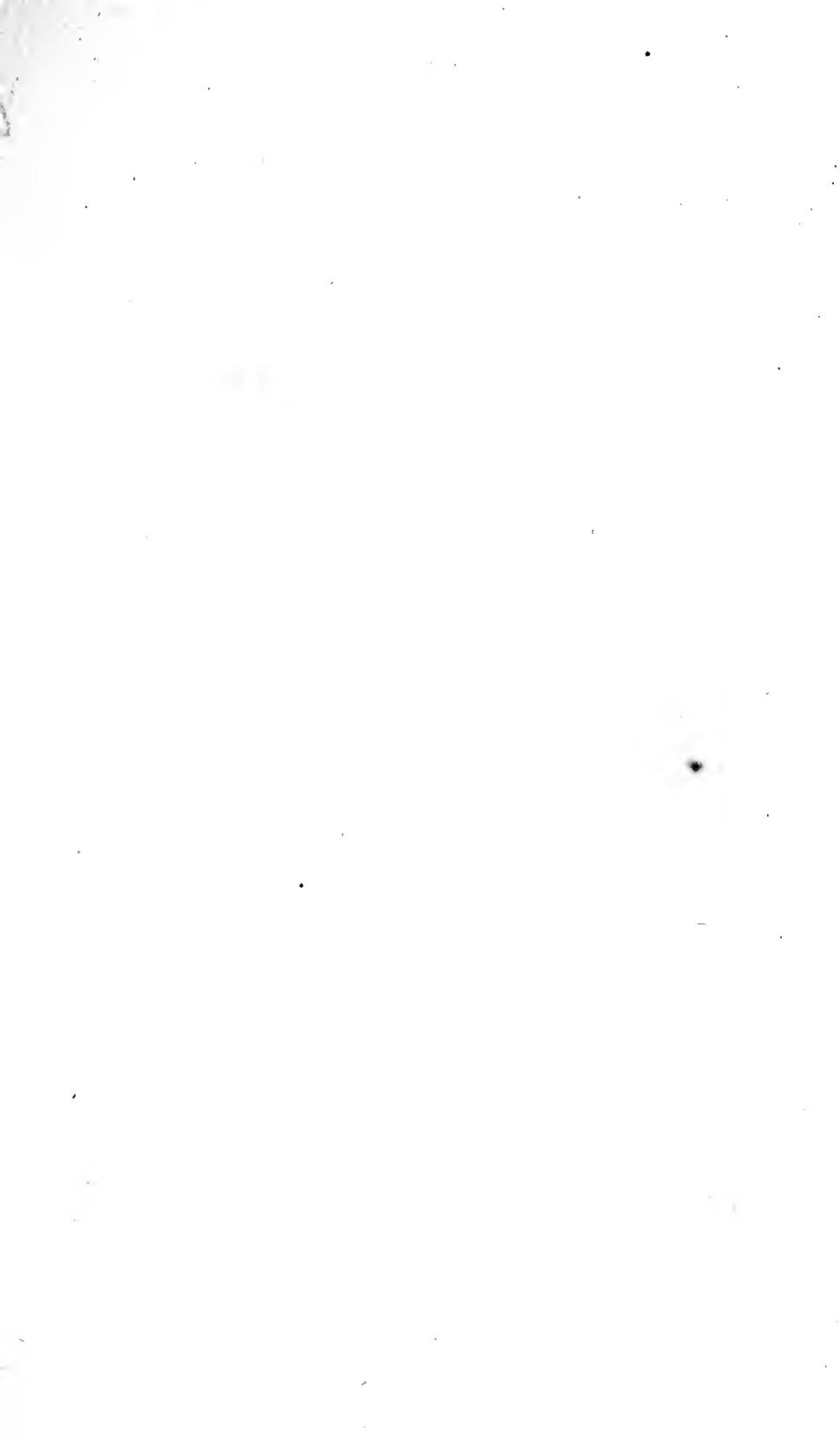
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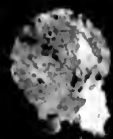
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